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“If You’re Not *That* as an Asian Woman,
You’re Not Shit as an Asian Woman.”
(Re)negotiating Racial and Gender Identities

Andi T. Remoquillo

M.A. Thesis

CMS Citations

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Introduction

Asian-American Women's Sexual and Gender Identities in the Contemporary U.S.

Situating the project

Within this project, I analyze the ways in which Asian-American women are (re)negotiating their gender and sexual identities in contemporary U.S. While any use of the term “Asian-American women” may present itself as a blanket statement that collapses all Asian-American women into one easily digestible identity category that assumes each woman experiences the world around them in the same manner, my intent is to challenge that very notion. My use of the term “Asian-American woman” acknowledges, confronts, and engages with the ways in which Asian-American women in the contemporary U.S. have been continuously re-homogenized by and within dominating Western discourses, discourses that often inform the ways in which Asian-American women themselves are constructing “Asianness” and “femininity” in potentially reductive, underdeveloped, and sometimes harmful ways. On the other hand, my use of the term is also in such a way that highlights moments in which individual women and women as a collective group are (re)imagining the meanings of Asianness and femininity, and are navigating their ways within these Western constructs.

My research is organized into three primary domains: representations of Asian-American women in U.S. media, intergenerational communication, and intimate relationships. However, it is crucial to understand that while we may discuss these three domains separately, there is never a moment in which they exist as mutually exclusive for Asian-American women's everyday lives. Both “Asian” and “woman” are concepts that continue to be homogenized within the

contemporary U.S., often constructing those that fall under either or both identities with little nuance or complexity. Furthermore, the homogenization of these constructs often leave little to no room for individual expression or acknowledgement of one's individual agency. The quest for more nuanced and complex understandings of what it means to be Asian-American *and* a woman continues within and outside of feminist academia, and a need for such a project can be easily exemplified by the internet. Today, the internet has grown to be one of the richest sites from which a consumer can both absorb and contribute to the discourses of gender, race, and sexuality. The internet, in this sense, is not simply a creation of individual imagination, but a *curation* comprised of already existing bodies, sounds, and art that are reflective of one's cultural modernity (Cho 2015). Therefore, in order to exemplify how contemporary Western cultures (re)produce particular constructions of Asian-American women, I implore you to type in the words "Asian women" into the Google Search engine. What do you find? Now type in the words "Asian girls" into the same search engine; what do you find? Take this simple research even a step further, and venture into the pool of images that Google provides when searching for "Asian women" and "Asian girls." What can you tell me about what you have found; are you at all surprised by your findings?

"50 of the Hottest Asian Girls On the Internet," "Hot Asian Girl Undressing," "22 Things to Know Before Dating an Asian Girl," "4 Reasons You Shouldn't Date Asian Girls," and, "American Man Makes a Living 'Getting Laid' by Asian Women." These are the titles of the top five links when searching for Asian women and girls. Similarly, you will find that the Google image results do not significantly differ depending on whether or not Asian "girl" or "woman" was specified - both yield images of attractive (young) Asian women who were posing

seductively in very little to no clothing. While we see here how “girl” and “woman” are collapsed into one nearly indistinguishable category for Asians, we also immediately see how the term “Asian” is used as a means to describe the content of the website, article, or video. Yet, we have no idea if the “Asian” woman who is advertised as undressing is Korean, Japanese, Filipina, etc., or if there is a specific group of Asian girls that “you” (presumably a straight, white, male audience) should not date as the article suggests, or if all types of Asian women are undateable. Probably the most troubling title listed leaves us with no idea if this “American man” even knows the ethnic differences between the “Asian women” he is “getting laid by,” nor does the title even clarify whether or not some of these women are U.S. citizens themselves.

If we briefly compare these findings to a Google search conducted on white women, the results are quite interesting. The image results gives us countless headshots of recognizable celebrities, and a significantly smaller amount of nearly-naked, erotically posed white women. The “All” Google search for white women, however, gives us articles such as, “White Women Looking For Black Men,” “Why are White Women Dating Colored Men?,” and, “The Phenomenon of White Women Who Only Date Black Men.” Comparing the Google search results between Asian women and White women tell us that sexuality, eroticism, and deviancy are *produced* in white women when a man of color is present, even more so when that man is black. On the other hand, we see how eroticism and deviancy are already present for the Asian woman even when she is alone. This then tells us that hypersexuality, eroticism, and deviancy are always-already existing *within* the Asian woman herself. The titles of the most popular links and image content tells us that it is not necessarily the woman that is at the forefront of this

discussion, rather, it is when her gender and sexuality intersects with ideologies of the racial “Other” that an erotic sensationalism is made plausible.

Within this project, I engage with the concept of the Other as it has been presently conceptualized by postcolonial theorists. Referred to as the father of Postcolonial theory, Edward Saïd conceptualized the Other as articulated by western colonial powers. This articulation posits those of the Orient, or of the East, as backwards, intellectually stunted, perverse, and immoral, therefore in need of western salvation (Saïd 1979). “Otherness” is similarly conceptualized by Meyda Yegenoglu in her book, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a feminist reading of Orientalism*,” as dependent on the West’s representations of the Orient as “interwoven by sexual imageries, unconscious fantasies, desires, fears, and dreams.” (Yegenoglu 1998) By bringing together in conversation postcolonial theorists such as Saïd and Yegenoglu, this project analyzes the Othering of Asian-American women in contemporary western discourses as contingent to their perceived hypersexuality - one that informs the colonialist fantasies in which Asian-American women are the targets for repeated objectification. However, my work is also informed by Filipino-/American, postcolonial, psychologist, E.J.R. David, who complicates the western notion of Otherness by discussing the tagalog word, *kapwa*. According to David, *kapwa* is commonly related to the english word “others,” yet the more accurate translation of *kapwa* is actually “both” or “fellow being.” (David 2014) Therefore, when I refer to the Othering of Asian-American women throughout this project, I refer to the orientalist discourses that construct Asian-American women following Saïd and Yegenoglu, but I simultaneously refer to the ways in which Asian-American women and their immigrant families are (re)creating their identities within the contemporary U.S. in ways that challenge western perceptions of Asian-Americans

being seen as unwelcome “foreigners.” As I will explain later on in the chapter, transnational feminism plays a crucial role in my work as I deconstruct Asian-American women’s Othering within the United States. Transnational feminism, postcolonial studies, and Asian-American studies allows us to better understand how race, gender, and sexuality are continuously (re)configured when western discourses work to maintain notions of who belongs versus who is an “outsider.”

The Other within the Western imaginary can be found so quickly (.33 seconds to be exact) in something as mundane as an internet search, and these searches show us how the Other is rooted in notions of racial, gender, and sexual deviancy. As very real, tangible, and material beings, everyday Asian-American women are constantly measured against the fantastical images, websites, and articles that attempt to collapse Asian femininities and sexualities into a homogenous commodity. I had previously asked if you were at all surprised by the search results for Asian women. As an Asian-American woman who first conducted that Google search years before my Master’s thesis even crossed my mind, I cannot say that I was surprised to find Asian women being depicted as infantilized yet overtly sexual. To so many others like myself, who have lived in the United States for majority of our lives, we do not give these images of Asian women a second thought. We tend to simply accept these as natural and true, and by doing so, we (re)construct the same sexist and racist discourses in our everyday lives in the U.S. These are precisely the reasons why a conversation on how Asian-American women are navigating their sexual and gender identities throughout contemporary U.S. society is necessary.

While Asian-American women are constantly confronted with racist, sexist, and hypersexualized notions as they go through their every day lives, it would be dismissive to say

that these notions are the only things informing how women themselves are forming their own identities. We have take into account how they are *reacting* to such discourses, and ask to what degree are they embracing these notions and/or challenging them? We must ask the same questions when looking at how gender and sexuality are taught within the homes that these Asian-American women come from, many of whom have immigrant parents from different Asian countries. We must take it another step further and apply the same questions of identity formation when looking at how Asian-American women navigate their ways through intimate relationships, and look at how intimacy is conceptualized by the individual, her family values, and mainstream media images. By interweaving discussions on intergenerational relationships, intimate relationships, and U.S. popular culture, we begin to see how each one is not mutually exclusive, and how they cannot be so easily separated for Asian-American women. It is one of the goals of my Master's thesis to take into account all three of these factors when analyzing the ways in which Asian-American women are (re)negotiating their gender and sexual identities within contemporary U.S. Even more so, however, it is the ultimate goal of this project to highlight the ways in which Asian-American women's strategies of (re)negotiation are indicative of their individual agency and ability to resist colonialist/orientalist discourses, while generating new ways of identity (re)formations. Lastly, it should be noted that for this project I use the term "(re)negotiate" rather than "negotiate" because it is my belief that as Asian-American women, we are constantly reconfiguring, reforming, and reestablishing our gender and sexual identities within Western discourses - discourses that make up the institutions that have existed long before our own existences. We are continuously finding ways to develop a means of self-expression within a society that has so rigorously done the expressing for us. To (re)negotiate our gender

and sexual identities as Asian-American women means to take what is already there - no matter how troublesome, problematic, or belittling - and make something new of it, and make something more.

This project is heavily informed by three feminist theoretical frameworks: (1) postcolonial theory, (2) transnational feminism, and (3) Asian-American studies. Each theoretical framework works together as I piece together my argument, providing a platform from which we can discuss Asian-American women's experiences as it relates to colonialist and orientalist histories, as well as the effects of colonization on a transnational scale that informs many Asian-immigrant narratives, therefore impacting how Asian-immigrant parents are interacting with their daughters and with western society at large.

When discussing the gender and sexual identities of Asian-American women, one must take into account the historical, social, and political work that have contributed to current discourses surrounding racialized sexualities. Conceptualizations of Asian-Americanness within the twenty-first century U.S. can be regarded as continuations and expansions of previous ideologies based in Otherness. The "Othered" discourse for Asian-Americans specifically draws from Orientalism as a frame of thought that situates those of "Oriental" descent as inherently different and distant, even when these "Oriental" bodies are physically located within Western borders. This "outsider

within”¹ status becomes even more complicated when gendering the Oriental body, especially when taking into consideration the feminization of Asian cultures within the Western imaginary. Asian-American women and their sexualized/sexual identities then require particular attention within feminist and postcolonial discourses - attention that has not been consistently and/or adequately given thus far in academia.

Within feminist studies, the development of Asian-American women’s identities is scarce and niched; the work of Asian-American feminist theorists such as Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Ania Loomba, and Meyda Yegenoglu, while making significant marks within the field, still do not measure up to the amount of work done on white female bodies, thus feminism continues to be devastatingly white-washed. Furthermore, postcolonial studies creates a space in which multitudes of discussions surrounding histories of Western domination can take place - discussions that critically analyze the trends in neoliberal globalization and continuations of neo-colonial and neo-imperial relations within the global south. Postcolonial studies has also generally succeeded in highlighting the ways in which colonized bodies and communities have been positioned as feminized in relation to the dominant and masculine West. While feminist postcolonial theorists such as Loomba, Yegenoglu, Trin T. Minha, Tineke Hellwig, and Sunera Thobani, have contributed tremendously to bodies of work that focus on the unique effects that colonialism has had on the feminine/feminized bodies and sexualities, academia is still

¹ The “outsider-within” is conceptualized by black feminist theorist and academic, Patricia Hill Collins, as black women’s historical positioning within the white domestic sphere as workers for middle-upper class white families. Collins argues that this “outsider-within” status is integral to the formation of black feminist school of thought for its creation of a very unique standpoint. Collins emphasizes in her work: black women’s self-definition and self-valuation, the overlapping nature of oppression, and the importance of African American culture. For my own work on the marginalization of Asian-American women, I reconfigure Collin’s use of the “outsider-within” in order to explain how Asian-American women’s positioning within the U.S. is rooted in a unique standpoint that allows them a societal perspective that cannot be obtained by others. For more work on the “outsider-within,” refer to Patricia Hill Collins’ article, “Learning From the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought,” (2004).

dominated by schools of thought that “masculinize” postcolonial studies and white-wash feminist studies. This is indicative of the shifts that need to be taken within academia; what we need is a more nuanced development of feminist postcolonial studies that integrates narratives of Asian-American women’s sexualized/sexual identities into “mainstream” discourses of Western work. Such nuanced narratives must be generated in a way that flips white hegemonic ideologies of gender, race, and sexuality on its head.

Colonial/Postcolonial Theory

My work is deeply rooted in critiquing colonial and imperialist histories in which Asian female bodies have been literally and metaphorically transformed into sites from which white bodies, both men and women, have declared and maintained cultural domination. White Eurocentric ideologies surrounding the sexuality of Asian women have carried on throughout colonial eras and into postcolonial studies. Such ideologies have been, and continue to be, dependent on the binaries of savior/savage, goddess/whore, pure/corrupt, and Christian/deviant. All of these binaries are packed together within the dichotomous framework of the West and the East, or the Orient. The Orient, a term that collapses all Asian cultures into one essentialistic category, has evolved into this vast discourse within academia. Beginning with Edward Saïd’s *Orientalism*, his work has set the theoretical frameworks for postcolonialism as a field of study, and it is from his work that my own identity, as well as the identities of other Asian American women, have come into question by many other theorists before me. Representations of Asian-American women within the media have displayed the ways in which Asian/Asian-American women are portrayed in mainstream American culture by only a handful of character types, all of which are inextricably linked to notions of hypersexuality. For example, Chinese-American

actress Nancy Kwan's breakthrough role in the film *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960) is as emblematic of the Lotus Flower archetype as Lucy Liu's role is as indicative of the Dragon Lady archetype in *Kill Bill* (2003). While both archetypes will be discussed in greater depth later in the thesis, it is crucial to recognize how they function in order to contain Asian-American women within a socio-political cage of hyper-visibility and hyper-accessibility, which in turn renders them as rich sites for Western cultural domination. This then allows white, Western bodies to "know" the Orient as a static and monolithic entity. Saïd argues that it is through this knowing of the Orient as a subject-race that colonial powers have justified the total controlling and appropriating of colonized bodies, economies, and cultures (32). My research aims to not only be replicative in theory of Saïd's work, but to expand on this theorization by understanding how Asian-American women today have internalized Orientalism. In addition, I also hope to see the ways in which Asian-American women have challenged and resisted Orientalism through conscious and subconscious acts surrounding the formation of one's sexual identity. Such analyses drawn from the interviews will put actual voices and everyday lives into the discourse of Orientalism as it formulates and circulates within popular culture. Additionally, I aim to exemplify how white women's sexualities are positioned as superior to, and thus majorly defining, Asian-American women's sexualities through the use of Saïd's argument of Europe as powerful and articulate, and the Orient as defeated and distant. As Saïd argues, it is because of Europe's superiority that Europe articulates the Orient as its creator, "whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries." (57)

Ania Loomba's work in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, which further expands and critiques Saïd's *Orientalism*, also help shape the nature of my project. My undergraduate thesis utilized this idea of transculturation when analyzing the constructed representations of Asian-American women in porn and popular culture. My M.A. thesis, however, expands and broadens these arguments by incorporating the lived experiences and stories of Asian-American women. Transculturation was first coined in 1947 by Cuban anthropologist, Fernando Ortiz. This term was originally used to refer to the ways in which the colonized adopted and appropriated certain materials that had been transmitted to them by the dominant culture (Loomba 1998).

Loomba also offers insight on transculturation and hybridity as vehicles of resistance that are employed by the colonized (1998). The idea of hybridity and transculturation being anti-colonial acts help to generate a conversation on how Asian-American women may employ the colonial gaze that renders them as deviant, hypersexualized, and Othered in a radicalized manner that embraces such ideologies as tools from which to capitalize upon, challenge, and navigate their identities throughout white patriarchal discourses. Similar to Loomba's feminist analyses on *Orientalism*, Meyda Yegenoglu's book, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, engages in a postcolonial discussion that emphasizes Oriental women's positioning within the Western imaginary. Yegenoglu's analysis on *Orientalism* and the representations of Oriental women as inferior to the West draws parallels with my own work, particularly when I discuss the representation of Asian-American women's sexual identities in white hegemonic discourses. Much like Loomba and Yegenoglu, I aim to deconstruct and reconstruct dichotomous relationships between the West/East, masculinity/femininity, and familiar/other.

Transnational Feminism

When thinking about Asian-immigrant narratives, we must also consider the ways in which the “transnational moment” exists within diasporic histories (Clifford 1994). Working closely with postcolonialism, transnational feminism explores the ways in which neoliberal, neocolonial, and neo-imperial discourses are informing the construction of the feminized “Third World” subject, even as this subject resides within the global north. Transnational feminist theorists such as Chandra Mohanty, M. Jacqui Alexander, and David L. Eng have contributed ground-breaking work in the field of transnational feminism, Asian American studies, and queer theory. Their work on how gender, sexuality, and home are conceptualized within a narrow western framework are always-already present within my own analyses of Asian-American women’s sexual and gender identities within the contemporary U.S.

Mohanty’s chapter, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” examines the western feminist construction of “Third World” women and its tendency to be presented as singular, monolithic, and dependent on the salvation of western feminists (Mohanty 2007). Mohanty takes on the tenuous task of deconstructing and dismantling colonialist constructions of feminized subjects of the “Third World,” while simultaneously working towards the building and constructing of new conceptualizations of “Third World” women: “While these projects appear to be contradictory, the one working negatively and the other positively, unless these two tasks are addressed simultaneously, Third World feminisms run the risk of marginalization or ghettoization from both mainstream (right and left) and Western feminist discourses.” (Mohanty 2007) While I agree that the double-engagement of a deconstructive and reconstructive analysis is necessary when discussing subjects within Third World feminism, I

must push back against Mohanty's argument of the "risk" that Third World feminism faces. Her assertion that "Third World feminisms run the risk of marginalization and ghettoization" from mainstream feminism makes the implicit assumption that Third World feminisms are not already existing within the margins of mainstream western feminism. My M.A. thesis is predicated on the marginalization of Asian American women subjects within western feminist studies, whether it be in academia or activism, which is reflective of Asian-American women's marginalization within the entirety of western discourses.

The marginalization of Asian-American women within feminist academia and western society makes the formation of "home" and feelings of belongingness difficult to acquire by Asian-American women. The concept of "home" is central to diasporic studies, particularly when analyzing the transnational moments experiences by Asian-American women in the U.S. According to Eng in his chapter, "Out Here and Over There: Diaspora in Asian American Studies," Asian-Americans are unable to claim a concrete space to call home within the U.S. because of our unique histories of immigration into the U.S.: "Suspended between departure and arrival, Asian Americans remain permanently disenfranchised from home, relegated to a nostalgic sense of its loss or to an optative sense of its unattainability." (Eng 1997) The idea of Asian-Americans permanently occupying the "outsider" status is ever-present within my own analyses. When interviewing Asian-American women from Asian-immigrant families, home is often conceptualized by them as a site from which nostalgia for their countries of origin or expressed through the maintaining of "cultural" values as immigrant parents teach their daughters how to behave properly in contrast to their white peers, who are perceived as disrespectful, immoral, and without discipline. Eng continues on to explain the importance of

home as a “site of validation” in which subjects are able to claim and experience the privileges of legitimized citizenship. Taking this readings of “home” and applying it to how Asian-American women are (re)negotiating their gender and sexual identities allows us to better understand how Asian-American women, specifically those from immigrant families, are largely working towards establishing a sense of home, of belongingness, as they work towards identity (re)formation.

Asian-American Studies

Similar to Eng’s concept of home and Asian-Americans, James Clifford’s piece, “Diasporas,” analyzes the ways in which stories of diaspora show moments of displacement as well as how “homes away from homes” are constructed by diasporic communities (Clifford 1994). Similar to Clifford’s work, the work done by Susanah Lily L. Mendoza in her book, *Between the Homeland and the Diaspora: The Politics of Theorizing Filipino and Filipino American Identities*, discusses how Filipino-immigrant families and communities struggle against establishing an identity that allows for the assimilation into western society while simultaneously expressing nostalgia for “traditional” Filipino culture before immigration. Mendoza argues that within the Philippines, and the United States, Filipinos/Filipino Americans have come to mimic the colonizer’s gaze when viewing oneself and when viewing others (Mendoza 2002). She discusses how the purpose of Sikolohiyan Pilipinos (Liberation/Filipino Psychology) was to liberate the Filipino psyche from a colonized mentality (Mendoza 60). It is through Sikolohiyan Pilipinos that Filipinos and Filipino Americans can begin to reject the Western discourses that have trained them to internalize their inferiority to their American colonizers (Mendoza 2002). Instead, Liberation Psychology encourages Filipinos/Filipino Americans to generate their own theory of

thought (Mendoza 2002). Mendoza situates Sikolohiyan Pilipinos as opposing “Philippine Studies,” which draws parallels with Said’s conceptualization of Orientalism in that Philippine Studies makes the Philippines and its people mere objects to be studied and scrutinized by the West (Mendoza 2002). Liberation Psychology can then offer a new way of thinking about one’s own racialized and gendered sexual identity. By acknowledging that colonialism and Western ideologies transpired throughout the public consciousness are intrinsic to our self-construction as Asian-American women, we can then perhaps find a more productive way to engage with such harmful ideologies and move towards a new way of thinking of Asian-American women’s sexual identities as powerful and political.

Similarly, *Brown Skin, White Minds: Filipino -/ American Postcolonial Psychology* (re)writes Filipino-American history into academia as E.J.R David discusses the Philippine’s histories with Spanish and American colonization. The (re)asserting of colonial histories is so significant when considering how these stories have been left out of the dominating Western discourses, and it is simultaneously important when conceptualizing “colonial mentality” and how this kind of mentality impacts Filipino-American families. *Brown Skin, White Minds* does an impeccable job at explaining how internalized racism and a common misinformed nostalgia for Western colonization. Colonial Mentality, as discussed in the book, is transferred from the Filipino parents (who are often immigrants) to their American-born children, in-directly teaching them that what is white and Western is superior to their Filipino culture. Therefore, Filipino-Americans are taught from birth that because of their skin tone and ethnic background, they are inherently inferior, which often leads to a life-long struggle of fitting into a mold that they will never fit. While not all the women in this project are Filipina-Americans, Filipino post-colonial

studies is still an extremely helpful framework to use when analyzing how Asian-American women are grappling with their identities in Western discourses, especially when each participant shared at least one moment of feeling inherently different because of the color of their skin and family dynamics. Filipino psychology provides us with a framework from which a more general understanding of how we as women of color (re)colonize ourselves through continuous assimilation to white culture. What David's book lacks, however, is a thorough incorporation of how gender informs one's colonial mentality, which directly pertains to this project.

My analyses on Asian-American women's gender and sexual identities is also informed by the work of Celine Parreñas Shimizu. Her book, *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American on screen and scene*, draws parallels from that of Orientalism, and her work can also be interpreted as fitting into some domains of Filipino post-colonial studies. Shimizu bases her theories in the notion that Asian-American women, as subjects, are born into a world that hypersexualizes their very existence, thus shaping their consciousness and identities (Shimizu 2007). Shimizu insists on the embracing of these perverse sexual archetypes, rather than rejecting them, in order to challenge hegemonic discourses. Some women in this study expressed similar sentiments when identifying as sexually queer or gender-fluid for example, which they viewed as a form of challenging hegemonic structures. What I find so admirable about Shimizu's work is her unapologetic nature when speaking about "deviancy" in the sexualized and racialized context, and I found the ways in which some of the women I interviewed spoke about their sexuality and experiences with intimacy similarly provocative and empowering.

The work of sex-positive feminists of color is a framework that should always be considered when looking at how any group of women of color are (re)negotiating their gender and sexual

identities. No other framework has been able to successfully bring together feminist theory, post-colonial studies, anti-racist theory, and post-modernism into one school of thought like sex-positive feminists of color have. What needs to happen now, however, is the increased production of this kind of work as well as its inclusion into academia as a relevant and worthwhile area of studies.

Ethnographical Research on Asian-American Women's Sexuality

The current research that has been done on Asian-American sexuality has predominantly focused on patterns of HIV/AIDS in the gay Asian community, as well as parent-child communicative relationships when dealing with sexual education. These being the most widely researched topics tells us a few things about Western discourses and Asian-Americanness; first, it shows us how homosexuality and Asian masculinity are often conflated in the Western imaginary, thus being representative of Oriental bodies being seen as deviant, perverse, and infectious. This can also be representative of how the essentialized Asian male body is sexually feminized in comparison to white men (whose bodies are granted more fluidity and diversity in Western discourses), and other men of color. In addition, the patterns of research that focus on intergenerational relationships can tell us something about how much Western discourses link what is perceived to be "Asian behavior" to traditions outside of the West and rooted in "Oriental" traditions. This perception has worked as a tool to maintain Asian-American's "foreigner within" status. The "foreigner within" discourse was mentioned in Yen Le Espiritu's piece, "'We Don't Sleep Around Like White Girls Do': Family, Culture, and Gender in Filipina American Lives." Through interviews with Filipino immigrant parents and their daughters, Espiritu discusses the ways in which Filipino-Americans, and other Asian-Americans in general,

establish themselves as morally superior to white women and sexually controlled. This behavior has been interpreted as a kind of defense mechanism - one that essentially defends or justifies Asian-American legitimized citizenship. When discussing their family dynamics and households growing up, many women in this study positioned their homes as a concentrated site in which their “culture” is generated and maintained. When discussing “culture,” some of the women constantly used comparative language when describing their family. Referring back to Eng’s argument of the home being a critical space for legitimized citizenship, “culture” is often used as a substitute for “home” as Asian-American women discuss their immigrant families and their countries of origins interchangeably.

Espiritu’s findings appear to be in extreme opposition to what Shimizu and Orientalist discourse says about the image of Asian/Asian-American women being hypersexual and sexually deviant - while Orientalism very explicitly frames Asian-American women as hypersexual, the stories and perspectives derived from empirical research shows a kind of hyper-vigilance and policing of the self in terms of one’s sexuality. Ethnographical research on sexual identity formation of Latina and black girls are similar in this sense, such as the work done by Lorena Garcia in *Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself*. The policing of oneself or the policing of Asian-American daughters by parents is explained within this project as an attempt to (re)claim a sense of belongingness within the U.S. by challenging orientalist notions surrounding Asian women’s sexual identities.

As previously mentioned, Shimizu’s work resonates with Orientalism in the ways that she theorizes how Asian-American women’s constructed sexualities are posited in contrast to that of white women’s sexualities in pornography and popular culture, particularly through the

hypersexualized archetypes of the Lotus Flower and the Dragon Lady. I do believe Shimizu's theories to be true, and while the ethnographical research may appear to be saying otherwise, I believe that the studies' findings are actually quite representative of what Shimizu and others argue. Moreover, I find that through the coupling of Shimizu's work and ethnographical research we can begin to see the integration of the Model Minority into Asian-American identity discourses - discourses that had been largely predicated around the Lotus Flower and the Dragon Lady. Espiritu's findings, and the findings in another study on Asian-American female sexual socialization (Kim 2009), shows how two generations are reacting to narratives of hypersexuality. It is through these studies and interviews that Espiritu (2002), Kim (2009) and others reveal how Asian immigrant parents have been engrained with such ideologies surrounding hypersexuality, and how some sort of cultural paranoia begins to manifest. Research findings demonstrate that Asian-immigrant parental fears largely focus on how their daughters are perceived by White Americans, and how their daughters present themselves to White America. The studies also show how Asian-American young women's sexual behaviors and beliefs are very much influenced by parental expectations, although the studies tend to emphasize the perceptions of Asian/Asian-American parents rather than that of their daughters.

Espiritu explicitly states that for Filipino immigrants, cultural reconstruction and hyper self-vigilance has always been a crucial part of their positioning within the United States (2001). Espiritu contends that this is the case because of US colonization on the Philippines, similar to what Mendoza discusses in her own work (2001). Sumie Okazaki's study, "Influences of culture on Asian Americans' sexuality," similarly refers back to histories of Spanish colonization on the Philippines and the heavy influence that Catholicism has on Filipina sexual socialization. These

studies show how female sexuality is learned to be regarded as a taboo subject, particularly in the relationships between first-generation daughters and their immigrant parents. While I do find this research to be significant when going through my own research process, I feel as though they do not give enough attention to these young women themselves and how they are grappling with their sexuality outside of parent-child relationships. The studies highlight how Asian-American women's sexual socialization are influenced by their parents' teachings, but they do not take into account how socialization with others outside of the home - in white dominated spaces - has also shaped their experiences. Furthermore, the studies do not focus on the individual experiences of the young women in a way that provides a space in which alternative narratives can generate. Such narratives could potentially reveal how Asian-American women are actually engaging with their sexualized and sexual identities. These are the stories that we also need to see in order to understand Asian-American women's identities through a more nuanced lens, one that can allow individual agency while still being critically aware of colonial and societal influences on Asian immigrant and first-generation Asian-American women.

My thesis is deeply rooted in postcolonial, transnational feminism. Therefore, the work of Saïd, Loomba, Yegenoglu, Mendoza and more are crucial parts of my own analyses of Asian-American women's sexual identities. Orientalism is not simply a theory, but it is a state of mind that is ever-present within Western discourses; Orientalism not only shapes how white hegemonic institutions come to present Asian-Americans, but it very much shapes how we as Asian-American women perceive ourselves. Representational analyses conducted by Shimizu and other feminist theorists exemplifies how white hegemonic institutions are framed by Orientalist ideologies, particularly in the ways that Asian-American identities are too often

presented in an essentialized manner that frames us as hypersexualized, deviant, and inferior to the West. Representational analyses like Shimizu's, however, also provides theories of subversion as she engages with this idea of "productive perversity" as a means of reclaiming one's Othered identity and (re)generating individual agency. Discussions that emphasize agency and acts of resistance are key components of my graduate work; I do not simply wish to reiterate the oppressive nature of Orientalism and its effect on Asian-American women. Such an approach would simply re-victimize Asian-American women, rather than reconceptualizing Asian-American sexual identities as a site that is rich with the potential for radical transformation. In order to enact such a radical transformation, real Asian-American women and their experiences need to be incorporated into this project. Without their voices, my work would fall short of my initial goals - goals that were created in order to deconstruct and complicate notions of Asian-Americanness. I need to position myself, as well as other Asian-American women, as intrinsically linked to the theories that I am working with in addition to the theories that I am challenging. I must remain critically conscious of how I am not simply a researcher, but I am also an Asian-American woman who is constantly grappling with my gender and sexual identities as I navigate my ways through Western discourses, much like so many other Asian-American women in the United States.

Methodology

While content and representational analyses are major components of my project, the lived experiences and voices of actual Asian-American women are what truly enriches my work. As feminist scholars, we are constantly reminded that the personal is political; my racial and gender identities are, after all, what makes this work so personal to me. Starting at a young age, it felt

like I was constantly at battle with my identity as an Asian-American in white-dominated spaces. Deep insecurities about my status as a racialized Other eventually manifested into this relentless self-hatred, which my mother often took the hardest blows from. While I had primarily accredited my hostility towards her to something that all “normal” teenage girls go through, I see now that I treated her so poorly at times because I had subconsciously, yet wrongfully, blamed her Filipino-ness for my inability to embody what it was that I thought of as “American.” To me, being American meant having a nanny or a mom that stayed home and made me snacks, it meant having parents that spoke without an accent, it meant being skinny and blonde and cheerleading - an activity that my mother forbade me to participate in because she saw it as something that unrespectable American girls did. Therefore, while this project is rooted in my desire to explore more nuanced meanings of Asian-Americanness, writing is also one of the only ways that I know how to tell my parents, and my mom in particular, that I am sorry for pushing away my Filipino culture as an adolescent, and by doing so, pushing them away for so long.

Looking back, I see now how much I must have scared my Filipina, immigrant mother. At the same time, I also see how a sense of pride burned within her with each act of rebellion that I took. I was outspoken, out-going, and always on the go. As a restless teenager my main concern was catching the next train of thrills that would take me away from her and her tight grip, and ultimately, take me away from her “conservative” immigrant mentality. I remember being seventeen years old, walking back to the Lexus with my mom after we finished up our dinner at Houlihan’s, a chain restaurant in the predominantly white suburb that I grew up in. By this point in my adolescence, my mother was relatively accustomed to my outfits that were primarily comprised of skin-tight jeans and “crop-tops” that just barely passed my naval. While she never

failed to give me scrutinizing looks or verbally protest my outfit choices, she also recognized that I was a dedicated student, a member of the tennis team for the fourth year in a row, and all in all, a relatively “good” teenager besides my regular tendency to “not know when to stop arguing,” as she (still) puts it. Therefore, my midriff-baring wardrobe was not always a main concern for her, and yet, I still find myself pulled back into that parking lot of Houlihan’s, grappling with the implications of my outfit choice.

In that parking lot, my mother and I approached the car while two middle-aged, white men in button-ups and pressed pants walked past us towards the restaurant’s entrance. While the men were in obvious conversation with one another, they still slowed down to look at me. One of the men then gave a loud, low whistle at my direction. I am not certain whether or not my mother noticed their behavior at the same moment as I did, or if her realization came once I spun around and barked in their direction, “What the *fuck* are you looking at?!” I remember feeling that reassuring, warm ball of fire harvest in the pit of my stomach - that familiar feeling that I always felt after shooting down men’s “cat-calls.” My mother, on the other hand, was not so pleased. She whipped her attention away from the men and towards me. She then hissed through her teeth, “Shut up, Andrea!” The smugness I once had quickly fled as feelings of shock and shame replaced it, rushing blood to the surface of my face as I momentarily cowered under my mother’s scowl. As we sat in the car, we spat words at each other as we fumbled with our seat belts, as if the elastic restraint would keep us from leaping from one seat to the other.

“I didn’t do anything wrong, mom!”

“Don’t you *ever* say that again! Especially to men you don’t know!”

“They deserved it, didn’t you hear him whistle at me?!”

“Well who’s fault is that - look at what you’re *wearing*!”

I distinctly remember feeling suffocated in that car, feeling as though I was literally choking on my pride and tears. I look back at the young girl who sat in the front seat, wearing her skinny jeans and grey, cotton crop-top that read “BOYS” across her chest; a young girl who wondered why her mom always regarded her appearance with such disdain while her (white) best friends never received that kind of criticism from their mothers. I look back and I see her asking herself, “why did I wear this stupid outfit?,” and, “how could she side with those disgusting men?” I see this seventeen year old me staring through the windshield, tears stinging her eyes and arms folded over the exposed flesh of her stomach, as her mother sat to her left with both hands tightly gripping the steering wheel. I look back and see how her mother was not simply shaking in her own seat with anger, but with fear. I now realize that this fear was rooted in her knowledge that as a young Filipina-American girl who had “sex-appeal,” the threat of ill-intended men was even higher.

I look back and realize how close my mother and I actually were in that car, both physically and emotionally. I look back and see how her concern for my safety, her fear of me being harmed, and ultimately my own inability to see her as anything more than a controlling, naive, immigrant mother are what created the essence of distance between us throughout my entire adolescence. Although today it seems like we disagree on more things than we agree on, I am now able to understand her actions as forms of resistance and survival, rather than as subservience to a white heteropatriarchy. My own conceptualization of resistance is defined by

verbal assertiveness, by reading and writing, by cussing, and by fighting with whoever attempts to challenge my pride as a sex-positive, Filipina-American feminist. However, my forms of explicit resistance are privileges that my immigrant parents (my mother in particular) have made possible for me. They traded in their rich Filipino culture for watered down versions of “Asian” cuisine; they moved into a rich, white suburban neighborhood and endured the neighbors’ teasing remarks about our big and frequent family parties; they purposefully did not teach us tagalog (their native language) and they even smiled when their own children mocked their accents, their inability to differentiate between P’s and F’s, “he’s” and “she’s.” My parents, similar to so many other immigrants, internalized colonial ideologies when already in the United States so that their children could successfully “pass” as American - as natural, as wanted, and as belonging.

Growing up, I did have a boisterous sense of confidence which was made possible because of their sacrifices, and yet, I still went through moments of severe depression, anxiety, anorexia, compulsive exercising, laxative and diet pill addictions, alcohol abuse, and emotionally abusive relationships because I did not feel worthy of belonging anywhere. Nothing about me felt natural, desirable, or fitting. While my parents’ love for me has always been undeniable, there were still times that their love alone did not stand a chance against bigger systems built from racism, sexism, and colonialism.

Throughout our lives, Asian-American women like myself are left to (re)negotiate, our identities on our own. It is through this (re)negotiation that our gender and sexual identities come into constant contact with our racial identities. The Asian-American women interviewed for this project share similar experiences like my own, but perhaps even more importantly, they tell their own stories that show just how dynamic experiences with gender, race, and sex/sexuality are.

While the interviewees' stories are often painful and disheartening, their stories are also what challenges age-old assumptions that Asian-American women can be collapsed into a single, monolithic, homogenous narrative within the the U.S. imaginary. My own experiences as an Asian-American woman contain moments in which I challenge hegemonic notions surrounding Asianness and femininity. It is within our narratives that new understandings of what it means to be an Asian-American woman, what it means to resist oppression, and what it means to be empowered by one's gender, race, and sexuality emerge/(re)emerge.

This project utilizes a mixed-methods approach that combines empirical research with discourse and content analyses. As a post-colonial feminist scholar, I am not simply interested in pointing out the structures that marginalize Asian-American women. While such a conversation is important to have, particularly when locating where oppression comes from and how power is allocated within Western discourses, I find it even more important to engage in a critical conversation that includes Asian-American women themselves. To simply talk *about* these women does very little, particularly when colonial and imperial discourses have only talked about Asian/Asian-American women while doing nothing to consider our individual politics, emotions, and identities. What needs to happen, and what this project aims to do, is deconstruct the already-existing conversations surrounding Asianness and femininity, and reconstruct it in such a way that Asian-American women themselves have a say in where the conversation leads. In order for continuous de-homogenizing of Asian-American women to occur (similar to the work of Mohanty in "Under Western Eyes"), and instead replace it with narratives of empowerment and resistance, we need to listen to what actual Asian-American women are saying.

This project primarily focuses on conversations and interviews with ten Asian-American women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four, who have different socio-economic backgrounds, educations, sexual orientations, and immigration statuses. These conversations are structured around how gender and sexual expressions were communicated by parents via verbal/nonverbal discussions, and women's experiences with sex, intimacy, and romantic relationships. The two underlying questions that informed all interviews were (1) what experiences and conversations did these women have throughout their lives that shaped their gender and sexual identities today, and (2) how are these women engaging in a process of gender and sexual (re)negotiations that can be acknowledged as acts of identity (re)formation and individual agency. Additionally, I should make it discernible, that not all of the participants so easily identify themselves as an Asian-American woman. Two participants are trans-racially adopted, therefore embracing Asian as part of their identities necessitated a tenuous process throughout their lives of understanding themselves as different than their white parents, white extended family members, and white peers. Twenty-two year old Marisa*, for example, identifies as "ethnically Chinese, racially white." For Marisa, her mixed-identity is difficult for others to understand because she is merely read by the racial markers that display her Chinese identity. Furthermore, when considering the term "woman," twenty-one year old Vi* pushes back against gender binaries and instead identifies themselves as both sexually and gender queer, or "gender-fluid," although they are aware that they are perceived solely as a woman by others. Recognizing how both racial and gender identities are socially constructed is crucial when discussing issues of identity (re)negotiations. Therefore while I recognize and respect all of their preferred pronouns, sexual orientations, gender identities, and racial/ethnic identities, the truth remains that each one

is still read very simply as an Asian/Asian-American woman by dominating Western discourses. The questions and discussions I had with them were predicated on that exact notion of being read as something that may not line-up with how they feel, therefore when I refer to them as “Asian-American women,” it is a way of recognizing how hegemonic structures are perceiving them. In order to minimize any risks of my project (re)marginalizing any of the participants, I had contacted Vi during the writing process and discussed how they would like to be identified in the moments that I refer to the participants as a collective group. They told me that since they are gender-fluid, they are comfortable with being referred to as a woman as well as all other gender pronouns.

During an interview with a transracially adopted, Korean-American young woman named Eliza*, I had found myself revisiting, re-questioning, and re-confronting notions of Asian-Americanness as it intersects with notions of femininity. At the young age of eighteen years old, Eliza has already developed a firm understanding of how Asian-American women’s identities are packed with notions of hypersexuality, exoticism, and servility to their parents and to white men. What was once again reiterated during this rich and emotionally complex conversation with Eliza was how women of color are often constructed and articulated by their white counterparts. Eliza, although raised “white,” recounted moments of “having to confront” her Asian identity only when others’ readings of her as an ethnic Other emphasized (or created) ideas of difference. The same experiences of confronting - or engaging with - one’s identity as an ethnic Other were shared by other participants in the study, most of whom had not been transracially adopted by white parents.

Having the opportunity to engage in conversations with such intelligent, strong, passionate, self-aware (even if they did not always feel so) individuals truly was a privilege. Their stories, their moments of love and hate, passion and struggle, do not miraculously gain credibility and weight from being put down in writing. The credibility, realness, and tangibility of their stories emerged in the exact moments that these said experiences occurred; the exact moment when that man at a party called them “exotic”; the exact moment that a complete stranger on the train shamed them for not speaking Mandarin; the exact moment that they were told that their skin was too dark to be deemed a pretty Indian woman; the exact moment when they first *really* looked at their surroundings, and asked themselves, “where do I belong?” I have asked myself this question so many times, and I continue to grapple with my sense of belonging as an Asian-American woman in the U.S. Therefore, I am cognizant of how this project serves as a way to provide answers for other Asian-American women as well as for myself.

Summary of Chapters

This project is set-up by chapters that are created and organized strategically in order to (1) layout a historical background of Asian immigration into the U.S., particularly how immigration discourses impact Asian-American women in contemporary U.S., (2) contextualize Asian-American women’s experiences with stereotypes surrounding gendered racism by analyzing a culture that is heavily influenced by the messages and images generated by the mainstream Western media and popular culture, (3) explain how Asian-American women’s gender and sexual identities are informed by family and intergenerational relationships, particularly when these women recall conversations surrounding sexuality, pregnancy, and physical appearance, and lastly, (4) how they are navigating their race, gender, and sexualities within intimate relationships

with partners (predominantly white men) who often have pre-conceived, inaccurate notions of Asian-American women as submissive and/or hypersexual.

While each chapter has an overall theme, whether it be immigration, media representations, intergenerational relationships, or intimate relationships, each topic will be discussed in relation to one another, and as continuously informing each other's discourse formation. We cannot talk about intergenerational relationships between immigrant parents and their daughters without considering U.S. immigration laws. Similarly, discussion on how Asian-American women are navigating their ways throughout intimate relationships is not sufficient without also discussing how Asian-American women's sexualities are constructed within the contemporary Western imaginary. As the chapters unfold and build off of one another, reconceptualizations of how Asian-American women are (re)establishing agency and empowerment are unveiled.

Chapter One

Establishing Asian Women as the Hypersexual Other Within U.S. Immigration Laws

This chapter analyzes specific U.S. immigration laws, starting from the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1886 to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, in order to set-up the socio-political framework in which Asian-American women are residing in today. This does not mean to say that all Asian-American women are interpreting or engaging with their surroundings in the same ways, for Asian-American women experience the world around them in very specific terms that are often dependent on their immigration status, socio-economic standing, sexual orientation, disabilities and more. Rather, I assert that Western socio-political discourses - which all Asian-American women are active agents in - are *perceiving* these Asian-American women as a homogenous, monolithic group with very little to no individual distinction. Today in the U.S., Asian-American women continue to struggle against racialized and gendered stereotypes that frame them as submissive, servile, and hypersexual, while simultaneously expecting these Asian-American women to be high-achieving students and workers within a capitalist economy. The sexualized descriptives are often perceived to be historically embodied by the Other in Western discourses, while the emergence of the Model Minority came much later on in the twentieth century U.S. These common, overarching assumptions of Otherness surrounding sexuality, however, are what contributes to the “Yellow Fever” that appear to be predominantly held by

white men². The Asian-American women in my study repeatedly expressed their hyper-awareness (and wariness) of white men whom they perceived to have “Yellow Fever.” Furthermore, while the women in my study were not yet born during the passing of the laws I discuss in this chapter, I argue that ideologies surrounding nation, nationalism, gender, and race transpired through U.S. immigration laws have become so deeply engrained into Western discourses that Asian-American women still face the repercussions as the (presumed) sexually deviant Other in the U.S. today. By analyzing the ways that the 1924 National Origins Formula and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (also known as the McCarran-Walter Act) reiterated narratives of inclusivity/exclusivity, insider/outsider, we can see how Asian immigrants are generally framed as undesirable immigrants and dangerous foreigners throughout the twentieth century and into present-day society.

Within Western discourses, the gendering of Asian immigrants becomes most visible during the War Brides Act of 1947. This chapter asserts that while Asian immigrants were already regarded as deviant and perverse foreigners, the War Brides Act of 1947 framed Japanese war brides in particular as foreign enemies invading the domestic spheres of the U.S. - as enticing American men into marriage and disrupting the nuclear family that once built upon an American husband and his American wife. This notion is reiterated and further exemplified by American Red Cross bride schools lead by white women. On the one hand, publications and media content from the mid-twentieth century appear to be regarding Japanese war brides in a positive,

² The fetishization of Asian women is often referred to by the popularized term, “Yellow Fever,” which is often appropriated in online dating forums or pornography websites in order to promote categories that exclusively showcase Asian women. According to U.K. Journalist, Yuan Ren, “Yellow Fever” is defined as the “well-peddled myth that Asian women make better sexual lovers than other women, while at the same time, having no meaningful presence in politics and popular culture.” (2014) Empirical research conducted in the U.S., U.K., and Canada show an alarmingly high rate of white men who verbally express their beliefs that Asian women are more sexually “open-minded” than white women, thus resulting in white men “serial dating” Asian women (Saedi 2011).

admirable manner. However, as we analyze such content more closely, we can see how Western discourses such as those in the mainstream media still worked to maintain the perception of Asian women as inherently different and inferior to white women, implicitly suggesting that Japanese women could never truly fulfill the role of an American wife in the same ways that white women have.

Before a discussion on how Asian-American women and their gender and sexual identities in the contemporary U.S. can be ensued, we must first establish a strong understanding of how the contemporary U.S. exists as a socio-political arena in which Asian-American women are often collapsed into a monolithic group. We cannot engage in a critical conversation about their experiences of intimacy with white partners, for example, without constantly confronting the racialized sexism found within the rhetoric surrounding Japanese war brides. Likewise, we cannot effectively study intergenerational communication methods between Asian immigrant parents and their American-born daughters without understanding how these immigrant parents are regarded in the U.S. as permanent outsiders themselves. Furthermore, we cannot challenge our old understandings of Asian-American women and develop more nuanced understandings without being critically aware of the structures, systems, and ideologies surrounding immigration that are informing how Asian-American women are engaging with their surroundings today.

1.1 Locating the Undesirable Immigrants: Anti-Asian sentiments through U.S. exclusionary immigration laws

Beliefs that Chinese immigrants were morally deplorable and therefore a deviant presence within the U.S. primarily started in the mid nineteenth century. It is important to note that at this point in time, Chinese immigrant men greatly outnumbered Chinese immigrant women, largely

because of the ways in which Chinese men were brought to the U.S. as indentured workers to build roads and railways. In 1850 there were only seven Chinese women reported to be living in San Francisco while there was a reported 4,018 Chinese men living in San Francisco by 1855 (Sridharan 2000). The drastic disparity of Chinese men and women living in the U.S. have been recently attributed to Chinese cultural values as well as financial considerations which often prevented women from traveling. In addition, most of the Chinese men during the mid-1800's faced severe discrimination and racially-driven acts of violence while in the U.S. which made them reluctant to bring their wives and children in fear that they may face the same violence (Sridharan 2000). Women constituted about two percent of the total Chinese population in America at the time, and majority of the Chinese women living in California in the mid-1800's were working as prostitutes. With prostitution being one of the most rampant issues listed in the 1870 census manuscripts, and with sixty-one percent of the 3,536 Chinese women in California having listed their occupation as prostitution, Chinese women were often seen by white Americans as hypersexual and sexually immoral (Takaki 1998). Chinese women, whether or not they were actually working as prostitutes, were therefore equated with the assumed danger and corruption of the streets - a place in which "good," Christian women did not belong.

Furthermore, because of the skewed male to female ratios in the Chinese community, Chinese men often sought entertainment and sexual release in brothel houses (Sridharan 2000). While Chinese men were not the only men spending their times in brothels, their already established presence in the U.S. as a racial and national outsider, who were perceived to be "stealing" jobs from American men, fed into this idea that Chinese men were similarly sex-crazed, unlawful, and immoral. Locating Chinese bodies in the mid-1800's within the parameters of sex work and the

public sphere also contributed to the understanding of Chinese immigrants as diseased and dirty - as moral and physical pollutants within the U.S. This perception of Chinese immigrants as unlawful and diseased would later on contribute to the justifications of future U.S. immigration laws, such as the National Origins Act of 1924 and Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, that excluded immigrants on the basis of what the U.S. government deemed as diseased, unlawful, and immoral.

A long trend in the U.S. of excluding of Asian immigrants on the basis of assumed immorality and deviancy can be attributed to the 1875 Page Law. This law, while stating that any immigration of Asians must be “free and voluntary,” also forbade the “transportation” of Asian women to the U.S. for the purpose of prostitution (Yan 2009). The rhetoric suggests that Asian men, and women in particular, were being brought to the U.S. against their will, and yet as we will see throughout this chapter, Asian immigrant women have been continuously viewed as active invaders into Western society, one whose presence corrupted and demeaned the moral state of the U.S. with their perceived hypersexuality.

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 is the first U.S. immigration law that excluded immigrants on the basis of race and national origin (www.ourdocuments.gov 2016). This was the first time in U.S. history that Federal law proscribed entry of an ethnic working group, and is often attributed for beginning a trend of excluding working immigrants on the basis of race. What began as hostility targeted at the Chinese immigrant population eventually grew into a national hostility that perceived all Asian immigrants as deviant, perverse, and as stealing American jobs. The Chinese Exclusion Act defined excludables as “skilled and unskilled laborers and Chinese employed in mining.” (National Archives 2016) Approved on May 6, 1882, the

Chinese Exclusion Act was passed by congress and signed by President Chester A. Arthur.

According to the National Archives of the United States, this act provided an “absolute 10-year moratorium on Chinese Labor immigration.” This exclusion was justified by the belief that Chinese workers’ presence in the U.S. endangered Americans (www.ourdocuments.gov 2016). For Chinese individuals that had already migrated to the U.S. prior to the passing of law, new requirements were placed onto them, one of which required them to obtain certifications to re-enter if they wished to leave the U.S. In addition, Congress refused State and Federal courts the right to grant citizenship to Chinese resident Aliens, while these same courts still had the power to deport them. After the Chinese Exclusion Act expired in 1892, Congress extended the act for another ten years, and this extension was then made permanent in 1902, remaining in place until 1943 when Congress repealed all of the exclusion acts (www.ourdocuments.gov 2016). The longevity of the Chinese Exclusion Act shows us how Chinese individuals were perceived as always-never belonging within the U.S. As was exemplified by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, immigration laws excluding Asian immigrants were important sites in which national anxieties surrounding the stability of American homes and jobs could be seen as legitimized, justified, and maintained.

In 1924, Congress passed this discriminatory immigration law called the National Origins Act which restricted the immigration of Southern and Eastern Europeans and almost entirely excluded all Asians from entry into the U.S. More over, the National Origins Act completely barred immigration for all of those whom the Supreme Court denied U.S. citizenship, specifically Asians (www.immigration.laws.com 2015). For the next forty or so years,

immigration of Asians were drastically lowered while the experiences of Asian immigrants that were already living in the U.S were further negatively impacted as anti-Asian sentiments continued to grow. While the Chinese Exclusion Act specifically targeted Chinese workers as undesirable persons entering the U.S., the National Origins Act was an expansion of that act and instead targeted all Asian immigrants, sending an explicit message that the U.S. had no room or tolerance for Asians. After decades of Asians being understood as immoral and deviant, the Chinese Exclusion Act as well as the National Origins act were largely welcomed by Americans, and seen as necessities within society in order to protect the physical and moral well-being of America.

1.2 Home Invaders: Japanese War Brides and U.S. Bride Schools

Prior to the total exclusion of Asian immigrants coming into the U.S., Asian immigrant women legally entered the U.S. primarily as “picture brides.”³ The entering of picture brides, however, was explicitly disallowed in the National Origins Act. This can be related to the ways in which Asian women were already being associated with prostitution from the mid-1800’s, while also exemplifying the U.S. government’s fear of the Japanese population growing through the establishment of Japanese families. As Japanese women are coming from overseas to start families with the Japanese men who were already living in the U.S., their American-born children were then seen as U.S. citizens while their parents were still regarded as aliens. The War Brides Act of 1945, however, created a loophole through which Asian women could gain U.S.

³ The Japanese Picture Bride system in which Japanese men living in the U.S. during the early 1900’s to find wives from overseas in order to start families. A dominating reason for the Japanese Picture Bride system was to improve the image of the Japanese male by eliminating the “vices” of the bachelor society. Therefore, by sending Japanese wives the men could possibly be seen as similarly practicing Western constructions of the family unit (Lim 2009).

citizenship when the Picture Bride System was criminalized. The War Brides Act was initially passed in 1945 which authorized admission into the U.S. of alien spouses and minor children. It was not until 1947 that revisions were made to the War Brides Act so that Asian spouses were included (www.immigrationtous.net 2015). Prior to this revision, Chinese immigrant women were still barred from entering the U.S. due to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, and all other Asian immigrants were barred from entering the U.S. due to the 1924 National Origins Act. While the Fiancées Act of 1946 authorized admissions of fiancées for three months as nonimmigrant temporary visitors, the women were still expected to go through a process of proving their legitimacy and their “bona fide intent to marry their American fiancés.

“ (www.immigrationtous.net 2015) The 1947 revisions to the War Brides Act, while eliminating race as a determining factor, still stated that all war brides were subjected to medical examinations upon arrival and that if any women were found with diseases or disabilities, that would be a ground of exclusion (Thomas 2006). With the already-existing perception that Asian women entering the U.S. were sex-workers, one could infer that the expectancy and even paranoia surrounding disease and deviancy were disproportionately targeted at Asian war brides. While picture brides were meant for Japanese men living in the U.S., war brides were seen as an award for (white) American soldiers coming home from the war. Therefore, an exception was made in the existing U.S. immigration laws that would have excluded Asian immigrant women in any other circumstance. It is here that we can see how ideologies surrounding patriotism and white masculinity were dominating factors that justified the presence of Asian immigrant women. Reduced to objects that were representative of the United State’s triumph during WWII,

Asian war brides were granted a place within an important facet of Western society - the American home.

While Asian women's presence as brides to American war veterans within the U.S. domestic sphere was often met with hostility, many of these brides still saw marriage as an opportunity for a new life after their homes had been destroyed by the war and U.S. bombings (Barford 2015). A BBC News article, "The Japanese Women who Married the Enemy," written by Vanessa Barford (2015), included interviews with women, such as Hiroko Tolbert, who had come to the U.S. in the mid-twentieth century as Japanese war brides. What many of the women had quickly learned was that immediate assimilation to a Western way of life was a necessity if they wanted to survive in their new homes. Hiroko recalled a memory in which she first travelled to upstate New York to meet her in-laws; she had picked out her favorite kimono in hopes of making a positive first impression, but instead was quickly met with horror by her new husband's family. Hiroko explains in the interview, "My in-laws wanted me to change. They wanted me in Western clothes. So did my husband. So I went upstairs and put on something else, and the kimono was put away for many years." (2015) Hiroko was also given the new name of Susie by her husband and his family. The adopting of a Western identity necessitated the abandoning of her Japanese culture, even if this abandonment was not voluntary. Much like many other Japanese and Asian war brides, this abrupt assimilation was required of them so that they may be seen as belonging within these American homes, and as deserving to be in the United States.

Furthermore, American-ran bride schools in Japan⁴ were a common way for Japanese wives to learn how to be “proper” wives to their American husbands. The online BBC article provides what appears to be a possible promotional video for the American bride schools from the mid-1900’s. The video starts off with an American man in uniform speaking to a woman referred to as Mrs. Hammond, who is the wife of U.S. General Hammond. She explains to the man in uniform that the bride schools exist because the American husbands wanted a place in which their Japanese wives could learn how to be an American wife. Therefore, it was the duty of white, socially-respectable women to teach the Japanese wives how to do so. Within this video, we are shown numerous moments within the schools in which a group of Japanese women are learning how to walk, how to do their hair and makeup, how to iron clothes, make coffee and toast in the kitchen, etc. Within each of these scenes, a white woman is either directly teaching them or they are watching the Japanese women as they practice their new tasks. Mohanty’s theorization of the feminized, Orientalist Other resurfaces here as we see how a western White Savior mentality transpired throughout the bride school video. While bride schools were created in order to assist Japanese women in the assimilation process, we must also acknowledge the presence of an underlying assumption held by those in the U.S. that Japanese women cannot navigate their ways in a new country on their own, and therefore were in need of western assistance - of western civilization through the form of gendered education.

⁴ Bride schools in Japan were ran by the Red Cross. While some Japanese women were able to learn American customs in the schools, other Japanese women had to completely rely on their new husbands to help navigate their way within the U.S. This often added to the extreme difficulty of settling into their new homes in the U.S., where the Japanese wives were already being met with hostility from their white neighbors (Sottosanti, Karen. *Japan in the Heartland*, 2010).

What I found particularly interesting during the video was how the apparel of the Japanese women changed as the scenes progressed. In one of the beginning scenes, we see a white female nurse teaching a small group of Japanese women wearing Kimonos how to properly fix a bed. After a few other scenes of the Japanese women performing duties in their kimonos, we begin to see them in Western clothing, with their hair and makeup also changed to more “Western” styles. We also see the Japanese women performing tasks on their own (while still under the surveillance of their white instructors) and with what appears to be more comfort. This is in contrast to the beginning scene in which the Japanese women in their kimonos were shown awkwardly fixing a single bed together. I find that the ways in which the video presents the women, the bride school, and the American instructors are representative of an Orientalist mindset that posits the West as superior to the East. To begin, the changing of the Japanese women’s appearances to be more Western was an indication that the bride schools were succeeding in what they were meant to do - they were meant to “civilize” these Japanese women by changing their domestic skill-sets. Success in teaching these women the “proper” way to be a wife was indicated by their performance of “American” household tasks while also wearing American clothes, hair, and makeup. However, the fact that there was always an American woman present in each scene can also tell us how “success” is actually being measured for these Japanese women. The constant presence of an American woman, whether she was instructing the brides or monitoring them, can be interpreted as a physical marker that distinguishes the “real” American wives from the Japanese women learning how to be an American woman. As Saïd argues in *Orientalism*, the East is continuously articulated by the West and in a comparative manner, one that posits the West as intellectual and modern while the East is underdeveloped and

barbaric (Saïd 1978). Therefore the Japanese women's ability to carry-out such tasks were always regarded in relation and comparison to the "real" American women who did not need to be taught how to do such things because their Western up-bringing positioned them as superior and naturally inclined to be a successful, American wife. I argue that if Americans were to see footage of Japanese women performing Western domestic tasks on their own and without an American woman present, it would communicate that these Japanese women were capable of being just as good as white, American wives. Since the Japanese were still largely regarded as national enemies and unwanted within the U.S., portraying Japanese women in a similar fashion that white women are portrayed would be elicit a major moment of identity confusion for the nation state rooted in the fear of being unable to distinguish one from the other - unable to constantly know who is a part of "us" or "them." Implementing a means of hyper-surveillance over the Other is often used to prevent and/or cope with the threat of an identity confusion. As discussed by Yegenoglu's chapter, "Supplementing the Orientalist Lack: European Ladies in the Harem," the utilization of western women by western men to access the feminine spaces was used as a means to better "understand" and therefore control the feminized Orient:

Despite his ability to freely enter the Orient and move in and out as much as he wishes, the Western subject is frustrated by the closure of the space of the Oriental woman; he had no option but to speculate on the details from harem life, its mysteries, and the lascivious sexuality the other-sex enjoys behind that closed curtain. Moreover, the veil and its mystery, which most Western travellers denounce, is dropped in this "inner space." When the "inner" space is closed in this way, the only available means for the Western man is to rely on the Western woman's accounts of the harem's forbidden space, her description of the unveiled women, the details of their everyday life etc. It is thus only through the assistance of the Western woman (for she is the only "foreigner" allowed to enter into the "forbidden" zone) that the mysteries of this inaccessible "inner space" and the "essence" of the Orient secluded in it could be concealed; it is she who can remedy the long-lasting lack of the Western subject (Yegenoglu 1998).

Yegenoglu's description of western women as a supplementary tool used in western patriarchal discourses can also be used to explain the invisible yet ever-present state of American men in the Japanese bride schools. While the footage primarily shows us interactions between American and Japanese women, American masculinity and its western colonial efforts of conquering the feminized Orient are always present even when the physical presence of the western man is not. Assigning American women to teach Japanese women how to abide by western gender scripts is therefore a way that patriarchy and a white male surveillance over the feminine Orient is maintained.

Sociologists and geographers, Hiromi Ono and Justin Berg, conducted research that exemplifies how Western efforts to assist Japanese wives were co-existing with Western efforts to maintain white male and female superiority over Japanese women. In their article, "Homogamy and Intermarriage of Japanese and Japanese Americans With Whites Surrounding World War Two," Ono and Berg explain assimilation as a "process of incorporation that ends in shared experiences with and shared culture of the dominant group." (2010) According to Ono and Berg, it has been dominantly theorized that the final stage of the assimilation process is "marital assimilation," in which members of the "minority" groups marry members of the "dominant" groups (2010). On the one hand, bride schools for Japanese wives could be seen as an important part of marital assimilation - by teaching Japanese wives how to "successfully" be an American wife, assimilation to the "dominant" culture would almost be completed. On the other hand, however, we still saw distinct differences between the Japanese women and the American women within the bride schools. Within the footage, there is always a distinction made between who is the teacher (the white women) and who are the students (the Japanese wives).

This can be explained by the “heightened exclusion hypothesis” which, “emphasizes processes that maintain the existing racial order between the majority and the minority groups. It posits that the majority group’s preference for excluding the minority group builds when its privilege is threatened.” (2010) Therefore, in order to maintain the idea of Japanese women as outsiders, as inferior to American women, the Japanese wives must be presented as never being capable of fully embodying the ideal American wife in the same way that “real” American women could. The privilege that is being threatened in these scenarios would be white women’s assumed superiority and dominance over the Japanese war brides. While U.S. organizations such as the Red Cross were requested by the American husbands, the implementation of American women within these schools worked to re-affirm the notion that Asian women did not belong in American households, particularly after decades of equating Asian women with prostitution. It is here that we see how assimilation through bride schools were an attempt to help Japanese women assimilate to a certain extent, while simultaneously ensuring that white women maintained their superiority as wives for American men.

“Where are Those Japanese War Brides?,” an article written by William L. Worden in 1952 for the *Saturday Evening Post*, explores the question, “Did the marriage of some 15,000 American soldiers to Japanese women in the last half dozen years work out?” (1952) According to Worden, these marriages did work out as long as there was intelligence, willingness and “gunman,” which roughly translates to “grin-and-bear-it.” (1952) In his article, Worden appears to be sympathetic to Michiko’s experience as a Japanese war bride in an unfamiliar country. However, when describing the life that Michiko left behind in Japan, he mentions her two

children from her previous marriage whom she left in Japan with a relative while she moved to America with her new husband. Worden continues to speak on behalf of Michiko when he states, “She was lonely and missed her children, but only mildly homesick.” Worden’s description of Michiko as a mother portrays her as a faulty one - one who does not have the same maternal instincts as American women do because she left her children and was only “mildly” homesick. Worden provided no explanation for why Michiko temporarily left her children in Japan - he did not state whether it was for economic reasons, nor did he include how Michiko actually felt about being separated from her children for a few years. In the 1950’s, a time where the nuclear family was the central to the American way of life and when “mother-and-child” were regarded as a single entity in the West, Michiko’s perceived ability to be away from her children for that long and not be distraught about the separation worked to uphold the notion that Japanese women are inferior because they lacked the maternal instincts that white, American women had. Furthermore, Worden’s article attempts to highlight how “successful” Michiko’s marriage was by also describing the perceived peaceful dynamic between Michiko and her mother-in-law. It seems to that for Worden, the mother-in-law’s acceptance of Michiko and her playing of the samisen in the house was an indication that Michiko was doing well as an American wife because the American mother accepted her. Once again, we see how the presence of an American woman was a necessary asset when constructing narratives surrounding Japanese women and their ability to be “good” wives. We also see how near-invisibility is regarded as a positive sign for Japanese war brides when Worden stated in a positive manner,

Few neighbors are conscious that a Japanese war bride lives anywhere near, and practically none of them realize that Mrs. Frederick Cotter, working days and carrying for two youngsters in the evenings, and Mrs. Conrad Cotter, who works

evenings as a waitress in a Japanese restaurant, are contributing toward a Cornell degree in economics [for Mr. Conrad Cotter] (1952).

While Worden did give credit to the mother in-law as well as Machiko for working hard and helping Machiko's husband pay for school at a prestigious University, the inconspicuous nature of their mixed-race household is what portrayed their story as a positive one, in addition to the positive reference to the husband's respectable social status as an engineering student at Cornell University.

The "assimilation hypothesis" and "heightened exclusion hypothesis" are also applicable when analyzing Worden's article. Worden appears to be measuring the success of marriages between Japanese war brides and their U.S. veteran husbands by the wives' ability to abide by Western standards of maternal and domestic care, as well as the Japanese wives' ability to create a peaceful space with their American mother in-laws. However, Worden's description of their home and lifestyle is very careful to not present Machiko as indistinguishable from white, American wives. Worden includes Machiko's children from her previous marriage in order to construct Machiko as still inferior to white women because she is somehow lacking as a maternal figure. In order to maintain the superiority of the racially dominant group, as Ono and Berg conceptualize, heightened exclusion (re)surfaces in order to uphold the notion that white women are better mothers, and therefore better household assets, than Japanese women.

The "assimilation hypothesis" and "heightened exclusion hypothesis" are useful tools when explaining how Japanese and other Asian women were being perceived in mid-twentieth century U.S. To believe that the passing of the War Brides Act could suddenly negate any hostile sentiments towards Asian women after decades of anti-Asian immigration laws would be

unrealistic. However, the War Brides Act did evoke some sort of change in the Western imaginary as Americans were forced to accept certain Asian women because of the veteran men that these women were being associated with. This acceptance was only granted as long as the Japanese war brides were able to assimilate to the extent that their American husbands were happy, but not assimilate too much to the point that these Japanese brides could be indistinguishable from white women.

1.3 The Model Minority: A new understanding of Asian immigrants as the Model Minority during the late twentieth century

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, also known as the McCarran-Walter Act, was implemented in order to (re)exclude certain immigrants from coming to America. While previous immigration acts made explicit laws that stated which race of people could and could not immigrate to the U.S., and under what circumstances these immigrations could lawfully occur under, the McCarren-Walter Act discriminated against non-white immigrants in a much more implicit manner. Instead of excluding immigrant based on their country of origin, this new immigration law denied immigrants who were “unlawful, immoral, diseased in any way, politically radical, etc.,” while accepting immigrants, “who were willing and able to assimilate into the U.S. economic, social, and political structures.” (McCarren-Walter Act 1952) The McCarren-Walter Act, although having been signed five years after the passing of the War Brides Act of 1947, attempted to prevent any “enemy” countries, such as Japan, from entering the U.S. while encouraging the immigration of “good” Asian countries such as China (www.library.uwb.edu 2016). The McCarran-Walter Act’s grounds for excluding immigrants on the basis of being unlawful, immoral or diseased may not appear to be racially specific, but given

the ways in which racially specific U.S. immigration laws prior to 1952 had influenced the ways in which U.S. citizens viewed Asian immigrants in a negative manner, it would not be unrealistic to assume that notions of immorality, unlawfulness, and disease were (re)located onto the bodies of Asian immigrants in 1952. However, one could also argue that the McCarran-Walter Act had gender-specific features as well. Japanese men, for example, were seen as the enemy from the war while Japanese women were often seen as a reward for American veterans for being in the war. Even more so, the Japanese war brides discussed in the U.S. media during the mid twentieth century were often portrayed in a positive manner for their willingness to do whatever it took to be a “real” American wife to their veteran husbands. Many of these women left their homes and families in Japan, they traded in their Japanese culture for an American way of living, and they learned how to clean, cook, and act like an American wife does in the bride camps. Therefore, these Japanese war brides very clearly fulfilled the 1952 immigration law’s requirement that immigrants be “willing and able to assimilate into the U.S.” In addition, the Japanese war brides marrying American men could be read as these women turning their backs on their Japanese male counterparts, reaffirming Western notions that Japanese men are villainous people and inherently inferior to American men, while also reaffirming Orientalist notions that the West is superior to the East.

The total repealing of immigration laws that excluded people on the basis of race did not occur until 1965. Also known as the Hart-Celler Act, the Immigration and Naturalization Act was signed by congress in 1965, which abolished the earlier quota system that was implemented during the 1924 National Origins Act. A new immigration policy was established in order to

reunite immigrant families as well as attract skilled labor to the United States. While families that were once fractured because of past U.S. immigration laws could now be reunited, the latter objective of the Hart-Celler Act was arguably the dominating factor that pushed the passing of the law. Similar to the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, the Hart-Celler Act of 1965 encouraged the immigration of those that would positively contribute to the U.S. economy and workforce. “Good Asians,” such as the Chinese, Filipinos, and Indians, were praised for their educational backgrounds that were often very similar to that of Western professionals. According to the study, “Changing U.S. Immigration Law and the Occupational Selectivity of Asian Immigrants,” conducted by Arun Peter Lobo and Joseph T. Salvo (1998), the increase in educational attainment of many Asians while living in relatively “underdeveloped economic and political systems” in many Asian societies is what pushed many to immigrate to the U.S. Many Asians were educated in English and found that their skills were transferable to the U.S. labor market where they would also be given superior wages (1998). According to the study,

The flow of Asian immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s included a large share of those with professional qualifications, including a sizable number of foreign physicians, the Philippines had lost 63 percent of its stock of physicians to the United States; Taiwan’s loss to the United States was 35 percent, and Korea’s was 18 percent (1998).

With a drastic increase of Asian immigrants entering the U.S. (a reported 21,000 immigrants in 1964 and then a reported 131,000 immigrants in 1974) as well as high percentage of professionals leaving countries such as the Philippines, Taiwan, and Korea for the U.S., it would appear that the 1952 and 1965 Immigration acts’ objective to bring in “good” Asians in order to improve the economic system of the United States was accomplished. However, according to www.asian-nation.org, for every Chinese-American or South Asian with a college degree, the

same number of Southeast Asians are still struggling to adapt to their lives in the U.S. In contemporary U.S., Vietnamese Americans only have a college degree attainment rate of about twenty percent, which is less than half the rate for other Asian ethnic groups. The rates for Laotians, Cambodians, and Hmong are even lower than ten percent (www.asian-nation.org 2016). These statistics counter the Model Minority image that largely stemmed during the 1960's which constructs Asians/Asian-Americans as being highly educated, hard working, and obtaining "high skill" occupations (2016). The image of the Model Minority has become so intrinsically linked to Asian-Americans that many people in the contemporary U.S. believe that Asians no longer experience any racial discrimination, nor do Asians/Asian-Americans need public services such as bilingual education, government documents in multiple languages, and welfare (2016). Ono and Berg's assimilation hypothesis resurfaces here once again, primarily when referring to the assimilation phase of "structural assimilation." According to Ono and Berg, this phase is followed by "marital assimilation," and it is achieved when the minority racial/ethnic group achieves similarity in access to socioeconomic resources such as jobs and education. As the "assimilation hypothesis" theorizes, once structural assimilation is obtained, marital assimilation will most likely occur because in-group marriage will decline as marriage between the structurally-assimilated racial minority marries "up," or marries a white person⁵ (Ono and Berg 2010).

Looking at the death of Chinese-American Vincent Chin, however, we can see how hostility targeted against Asian-Americans continued to exist after the 1965 Hart-Celler Act. In 1982 Detroit, Chin was murdered by two white men after they got into an altercation at a bar.

⁵ Chapter four discusses this concept of marrying "up," or marrying a white partner, more in depth. Please refer to chapter four's discussion on how marital assimilation is still regarded within Asian-immigrant families as an indication of one's success in the United States.

Witnesses of the altercation heard one of the white men say to Chin, “It’s because of you motherfuckers we’re are out of work.” The two men then began to hit Chin in the head with a baseball bat; Chin died in the hospital four days later, the same day he was supposed to marry his fiancé. The white men were referring to U.S. automotive jobs being lost to Japanese manufacturers, (re)creating a perception that the Japanese were taking over American jobs, similar to the ways in which the Chinese were targeted in California during the mid-1800’s. The white men, Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz, never denied their actions, yet were able to plead down to manslaughter and were only sentence to three years of probation and fined three-thousand dollars (Wu, Frank H. “Why Vincent Chin Matters,” *The New York Times*. June 22, 2012). The death of Chin is only one post-1965 example of how Asian-Americans continue to be targeted and used as sites from which national anxieties surrounding one’s economic security within the U.S. are located. The notion that Asian immigrants were being “welcomed” to the United States during the sixties because of their assumed high work-ethics and contributions to the U.S. economy would also work *against* Asian immigrants and Asian-Americans already living in the U.S. Even when Asians are referred to as the Model Minorities, we still see within that very name the explicit specification that they are still the “minority,” and not fully welcomed into the “dominant” group of white America.

While the emergence of the Model Minority during the 1960’s may have appeared to replace the pre-existing perceptions of Asian immigrants as sexually deviant and untrustworthy, the assumption that the Asian population is a homogenous group with no variation remains to be a re-occurring pattern that both inform and are informed by U.S. immigration laws. As will be

discussed in the following chapters, contemporary Western assumptions of Asian-American women as hypersexual and servile sexual objects for white men co-exist with the image of the Model Minority. As we will see from the next chapter's discussion on the U.S. media's representation of Asian women as hypersexual objects, ideologies surrounding Asian femininity that equated them with prostitution did not end in 1965 with the passing of the Hart-Celler Act, even when the simultaneous expectation of Asian women to be over-achieving in school and the workforce also exist.

Chapter Two

The Hypersexualization of Asian/Asian American Women in Western Media(s)

Celine Parreñas Shimizu stated, “Our sexuality is embedded in history; our history is embedded in the sexuality we see on screen.” (Shimizu 2007). Similar to the previous chapter on immigration, while also building directly off of the previous chapter’s argument, this chapter lays-out the socio-political arena in which Asian-American women are (re)negotiating their gender and sexual identities within the U.S. media and popular culture. Western ideologies of Asian women that construct them as hypersexual and deviant are informing and informed by U.S. popular culture and the media. This means to say that Hollywood, the internet, and the pornography industry are generating/distributing content that reinforces hierarchies of gender and race - content that is implicative of white heteronormative discourses. As exemplified in the introduction chapter’s Google search analysis, Asian women in contemporary U.S. are constructed with very little variation and in a hypersexualized, exotified, and often infantilized manner.

Throughout this chapter I discuss art, pornographic material, social media content, Hollywood, and television shows in the U.S. that feature Asian/Asian-American women, some of which were created as early as the 1920’s. I argue that while these mediums may initially appear to be relatively unrelated to each other, each one continues to perpetuate homogenous representations of Asian-American women that conflates their gender and racial identities with notions of hypersexuality. Additionally, while some may argue that the content produced by Hollywood and other media outlets are merely fictional, I argue that all things “fictional” are

representative of the very real institutions that have existed throughout history (legal institution, family institutions, etc.), and that these “fictional” constructions also speak great volumes about what we as a society *want* to be put into existence, and what we as a society are fearful of happening or losing. Therefore we must remain cognizant of the ways in which symbolic constructs, such as desire and fantasy, are made very material and tangible through the production of representations. By dissolving the barriers that seek to divide fantasy and reality, fact from fiction, we can see how the production of comic strips, films, shows, and more are the material manifestations that both explicitly and implicitly exemplify the very real gendered-racism that impact Asian-American women today.

The Asian-American women I interviewed shared their experiences of being continuously confronted with inaccurate representations that their white friends and intimate partners have gathered from Western media and popular culture. For so many of these women, their identities as an Asian-American woman primarily “emerged” when white individuals pointed out their (perceived) differences - differences that these peers and intimate partners often learned to identify through the media’s representations of Asian women. The women in this project articulated their frustrations targeted at the U.S. media’s representations of Asian women, and how such representations informed the ways in which others tended to view them as sexual objects rather than as sexual agents. This chapter expands on the Google search analysis by similarly analyzing films, images, and social media content in order to discuss how Asian/Asian-American women are being constructed in a homogenous, essentialist manner within contemporary Western discourses while also acknowledging the individual agency that Asian/Asian-American women are generating as they create counter-Orientalist narratives.

2.1 Constructing Asian women as the sexually deviant Other: The Dragon Lady



Milton Caniff's depiction of the main antagonist, the Dragon Lady, from *Terry and the Pirates* (1934). The appearance of the Dragon Lady is always presented in a villainous, hypersexual manner:

Terry and the Pirates first appeared as a comic strip created by Milton Caniff in October, 1934. This comic is categorized as an “action-adventure drama” that features “realistically drawn adventures in the far east.” The protagonists are Terry Lee, an officer in the U.S. Army Air Forces and Pat Ryan, whose character initially went to China in search of a lost mine. The nemesis and main antagonist of the series is the Dragon Lady, who is depicted as a “glamorous but ruthless pirate leader.” (Wikipedia 2016)⁶ *Terry and the Pirates* became such a widely-read comic strip that by November, 1937, the comic influenced the radio series that aired three times a week. During WWII, particularly on the Eve of the Pearl Harbor attack, *Terry and the Pirates* was largely utilized as a non-traditional way of understanding what was happening in the “far

⁶ While images from the comic, *Terry and the Pirates*, were not difficult to locate on the internet, scholarly work written on the comic and the Dragon Lady in particular were much harder to find. Reviews, information, and plot summaries of *Terry and the Pirates* were primarily written on traditionally “non-credible” sites such as Wikipedia or online blogs without the author’s name printed.

east” by Americans. By 1941, the series was a fifteen minute, five times per week, serial that initially aired on WGN, Chicago (Widner, James F. *Terry and the Pirates*, 2002). I assert that the construction of the Dragon Lady’s character, the socio-political context in which *Terry and the Pirates* was created and circulated, and the overall popularity and intrigue that the series accumulated are key points to consider when looking at how Asian femininity was constructed in the first half of the twentieth century U.S. It is within Caniff’s construction of the Dragon Lady that we see how notions of hypersexuality, danger, and deviancy were manifested around Asian female bodies within, and outside of, the U.S.

In Celine Parreñas Shimizu’s book, *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American women on screen and scene*, Shimizu summarizes the archetype of the Dragon Lady as one whose vampish and deadly sexuality both entices white men and destroys them (Shimizu 2007). From the image of the Dragon Lady provided above, we can see how much her sexuality was made an explicit part of her identity. More specifically, the image shows us how her race is conflated with notions surrounding sexuality and deviancy. Looking at her outfit, we see how her “Oriental” top (most recognized by the collar, the clasp, and the color red) is just barely covering her breasts, while the rest of her tan torso is completely bare, exposing her very sensual frame. The bottom-opening of her top comes together in a slanted fashion, one that directs our focus to her face. Her ink-black hair frames her face, showcasing her beautiful, sharp features. Her facial expression is villainous as her eyes slant inward and her red lips are pressed together in a pout. She is looking directly at the viewer with what can be interpreted as both sexual desire and hatred. Her erotically posed body and undeniable beauty are used to entice an audience that we are presumably mostly young white, American men.

I believe that an important question to be asked is why a villainous character is made to be so sexually appealing? Audiences are supposed to identify the most with the protagonists of the story. In this case, the young, white men who are reading the comics are meant to identify more closely with an officer from the U.S. Army Air Forces than with the Dragon Lady. However, perhaps a part of why the Dragon Lady's sex appeal is such a core part of her character is because the protagonists themselves have an underlying, uncontrollable attraction to her that they know is wrong and unnatural, which is what makes her the ultimate villain - one that even the strongest, most American man that is embodied by a U.S. Air Force officer can never defeat unless he somehow conquers her "Oriental" sexuality. Feminist scholar, Mireille Miller-Young argues in her book, *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*,

White men, the endowed rulers of this racist and heteropatriarchal system, justified their sexual coercion of black women by arguing that not only did black women's lascivious ontology and "relaxed morals" make them willing participants, but the degraded and "casual" nature of sex with them protected white female chastity. (Miller-Young 2014)

While Miller-Young makes an argument around black female sexuality, I argue that the Dragon Lady, as an archetype of Asian female sexuality, is similarly utilized within *Terry and the Pirates*. Her undeniable sex-appeal and the male protagonists' struggle to defeat her throughout the series works to affirm the perceived deviant sexuality of Asian women with the U.S. during the mid-1900's while also upholding white female sexuality. In a time where the presence of Asian immigrants were seen as a national problem while Asian woman immigrants were primarily being seen as prostitutes, picture brides, and war brides, the domestic spheres of white, middle-upper class women were being threatened as their husbands or male-counter parts increasingly sought romantic or intimate relations with Asian immigrant women. Therefore the sexual

desirability of the Dragon Lady could also be interpreted as the comic strip's way of warning white, well-to-do women of the dangers that Asian women in the U.S. pose.

If we refer back to the comic's description as an action-adventure drama that features "realistically drawn adventures in the far east," we are then encouraged to conceptualize the Dragon Lady as more than just a fictional cartoon character. If the comic series is supposed to contain realistic elements, this same notion of realism is equally applicable to her hypersexual, deviant, and dangerous persona. Her villainous nature is so fear-provoking because it is supposed to be representative of the very "real" threats that white men face when they are in the presence of a deadly, seductive Dragon Lady. Therefore, if the United States is constructed as a patriarchal entity, the whole nation is at risk if the patriarchal powers themselves are being compromised.

The Dragon Lady continues to exist within contemporary representations of Asian-American women in the U.S. Although the ways in which she is embodied and appropriated differs depending on the time and place, she still heavily informs our understandings of Asian/Asian-American women within Western discourses as hypersexual, animalistic, and deviant (Shimizu 2007). Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss how the archetype of the Dragon Lady is continuously transpired throughout contemporary, Western representations of Asian/Asian-American women.

2.2 Asian-American women in U.S. pornography: (Re)establishing the hypersexual Other

I argue that while pornography is initially perceived to be detached from "mainstream" discourses, the pornography industry is just as reflective of our society's dominating ideologies

as Hollywood. Porn is yet another realm in which Western notions of sexuality, gender, and race are reconfigured and put into existence for consumption and voyeuristic pleasures. Furthermore, representations of Asian/Asian-American women in porn directly effect how Western societies views Asian/Asian-American women while also influencing the ways in which Asian-American women are perceiving their sexual identities. A number of the women interviewed talked about how often (white) men assume that they are “kinky” because of what they see in porn featuring Asian women. Twenty-one year old , Filipina-American Riley*, for example, expressed her annoyance and frustration about white men making outright assumptions about her sexuality.

When I asked her where she thinks these assumptions came from, she replied:

I just feel like there’s that stereotype [of being kinky] from watching their weird Asian fetish pornos. Like, I’m not about to shove something up my butt that comes out through my mouth for you (laughter)! I definitely think [Asian women] are hypersexualized a lot, because every time I try to talk to someone, or I’m starting to talk to someone romantically, they’ll ask me, “Oh are you like super kinky?” and I’ll be like, “dude, I’m just a normal girl.” It’s very aggressive. I’ll just say no, or I’ll just divert the conversation and be like, “ha ha...I love my drink. It’s great...” Just until they get the point and then we can start talking about something else.

Similar to Riley’s experience, twenty-one year old Eliza*, who is one of the transracially adopted participants, talked about how the porn industry presents Asian women as sex toys that are naturally inclined to participate in more taboo sex acts. Marisa*, another transracially adopted, twenty-one year old woman (who identifies as ethnically Chinese, but racially white) described the ways in which Asian women are portrayed in Western porn as, “usually really immature. Usually very small, petite, and weak. Having a huge bush? (Laughter) Also just like...cartoonish. They’re [portrayed as] really cartoonish people.” Shimizu articulates the ways in which these women are grappling with perceptions surrounding their gendered and racialized

sexual identities when she states, “As subjects, Asian American women are born into a world where representational tradition of hypersexuality forms and shapes general consciousness. This “general consciousness” that Shimizu discusses refers to contemporary Western discourses in which Asian-American women are active members. We can see where Riley’s, Eliza’s, and Marisa’s perceptions are coming from when we look at pornography websites and the ways in which their constructions/representations of race and gender are contributing to a public consciousness.

One of the most popular and free porn sites to date is PornHub, which features multitudes of categories that showcase almost anything one could think of - there is a category for Asian porn, Ebony porn, amateur porn, cartoon porn, lesbian porn, MILF (“mother I’d like to fuck”) porn, foot fetish porn, BDSM, interracial, and more. Each category tailors to a specific demographic based on their sexual preferences, fantasies, etc. As discussed by Susana Paasonen in her article, “Labors of Love: Netporn, Web 2.0, and the Meanings of Amateurism,” user-generated sites such as PornHub, PornTube, and RedTube are considered counter-cultures to the mainstream pornography industry which stands as one of the most lucrative capitalist institutions. However, as Paasonen argues, alternative porn (or netporn) sites can still be implicative of the same hegemonic structures that are found within mainstream pornography. While we do see more varieties of body types, skin color, and ages being featured in the videos, these “non-normative” identities are still organized in a fetishistic manner - one that still distinctly separates the “non-normative” from the “normal” or “neutral” porn that consists of cis-gendered, white, young heterosexual bodies. Therefore while we do see the inclusion of (primarily female) Asian actresses within these sites, their inclusion is still niched into the category of “Asian porn” and

contingent on how obvious their Asianness is. When scrolling through the “top rated” section of amateur porn sites such as PornFun, for example, we see videos of primarily white individuals. The very seldom videos that do feature Asians are (1) always almost featuring an Asian woman that is being advertised as a young girl or a “school girl”, (2) always with a white man or a white woman, and (3) made even more clear that the video is featuring an Asian woman by the titles which read “Sexy Asian Gives Her Boyfriend a Blowjob,” or, “Black Haired Asian Gives Me Blowjob.” (PornFun 2016) It is as if their race needs to be made even more visible by explicitly stating so, while the more prevalent videos that feature white women make no reference to race in their titles. In addition, Asianness is often constructed as a monolithic group within these porn sites, and sold to viewers as a easily digestible entity with little to no variation as a sexual(ized) product. Shimizu similarly argues, “A particular conflation of Asian and Asian American women occurs in Hollywood and film industry images wherein Asian American ethnicities stand in for one another. It is a violent homogenization of Asian American women who are lumped together in representation where cultural and other specificities are obscured and eclipsed by hypersexuality.” (2007) Porn videos that utilize Asian actresses as a selling point then work to reaffirm Western understandings of Asian women as an unchanging, mono-dimensional group, therefore to experience one Asian woman sexually is to experience all Asian women sexually.

By making one’s non-white race visible through language, yet allowing one’s whiteness to go unacknowledged, we can see how amateur porn sites such as PornFun.com are in engaging in colonialist behaviors as they continuously position female bodies of color as more out in the open and vulnerable to the (white) gaze in comparison to white bodies. According to Mireille Miller-Young, “The concept of the gaze, for many feminist scholars, serves as a paradigm for

asymmetrical power relations: the domination of the slave by the master, the colonized by the colonizer, and woman by man.” (*A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*, Miller-Young, 2014) Therefore female bodies of color within pornography are located within the gaze in a way that forces them as actresses and us as viewers to continuously (re)negotiate power. White adult actresses negotiate power differently when being located under the Western gaze. Due to the fact that whiteness has been historically constructed as “neutral” and “normal,” sex acts performed by white bodies are not eroticized in the same manner that bodies of color are, nor are white bodies constructed as different, deviant, and exotic. The marketing of racialized sexualities within the online porn industry is a strategic tool that reduces one’s racialized sexual identity to a sellable object in order to accumulate online user traffic. Simultaneously, the marketing of racialized sexualities as a means to bring attention to porn websites reinforces Western notions that perceive bodies of color as non-normative and commodifiable. When looking at how Asian women’s racial identities are used as tools for marketing on these porn sites, we can see how their racial identities are being used to maintain white-supremacist ideologies that construct white women’s sexualities as “natural” and “normal.”

Furthermore, *Complex*, an online publication that discusses contemporary U.S. popular culture, posted an article in 2011 that listed “The Top 50 Hottest Asian Porn Stars of All time,” in which Asian/Asian-American porn actresses were ranked in accordance to their looks, popularity, and career. A common theme that came up in these actresses’ descriptions were their specialties featuring anal, BDSM, gang-bangs, and more. Number forty-four on the list was a woman named Bamboo, whose description began by stating, “Her English may be limited, but the sexual willingness demonstrated by Bamboo was not.” (Alvarez 2011) Sex acts that are seen

as more extreme or taboo are often being linked to Asian women in porn, similar to what Riley had stated, which can bring us back to the construction of the Dragon Lady's perverse and animalistic sexuality. However, there is also a sense of servility that also appears when we think of Asian women in porn being marketed as "sexually willing," a type of servility and willingness that we do not necessarily see from the Dragon Lady but can see within the Lotus Flower.

Shimizu conceptualizes the Lotus Flower as the "self-sacrificing, servile, and suicidal Asian woman," one whose sexuality is not necessarily controlling white men like the Dragon Lady, but whose sexuality is at the ultimate mercy of white men. The Dragon Lady and the Lotus Flower are often discussed interchangeably within Western discourses, and in a dichotomous manner (Shimizu 2007). For Asian women in pornography, we often see them being presented as "wild" and sexually uncontrollable, or we see Asian women being presented as docile and toy-like, perceptions that Eliza and Marisa had mentioned. Within Western discourses, the hypersexualization of Asian women as either the Dragon Lady or the Lotus Flower are ascribed to them as natural and as necessary attributes in order to read the Asian female identity as homogenous (Shimizu 2007). As Riley's comment on men assuming that she is "kinky" exemplifies, and what chapter five will discuss more in depth, the fetishization of Asian women as deviating from sexual norms is a very real thing that Asian/Asian-American women are confronted with on a day-to-day basis, particularly as they navigate their way throughout intimate relationships and the general Western public.

2.3 Asian-American women in contemporary Hollywood: Where are they and what do they look like?

"Me so horny. Me love you long time." Some may recognize this phrase as the chorus line from 2 Live Crew's rap song, "Me So Horny," which reached number one on U.S. *Billboard* Hot

Rap Tracks in 1989. Others may recognize it from the scene in which it originated from during the 1987 action-drama, *Full Metal Jacket*, in which a trio of U.S. marines during the Vietnam war are being approached by a Vietnamese woman soliciting sex. There are also those who are familiar with the phrase, who have even used it to elicit humor, yet have no idea where it comes from. Even when used as a joke, however, this phrase always connotes a very specific reading on Asian women's sexualities as hypersexual and something to not be taken seriously because of the way in which the phrase was introduced. The implicit meaning behind this phrase is that Asian women have an uncontrollable sexual appetite, and we have come to understand this because an "Asian" woman in a popular movie said those words "me so horny." It is often overlooked, however, that *Full Metal Jacket* is written and directed by Stanley Kubrick, a white American film writer and screen director, who cast a Chinese-French actress named Papillon Soo Soo as the Vietnamese prostitute in the film. Soo's fictional character was therefore *given* this line which was originally said by the white man who wrote it, Kubrick, and yet this hypersexuality communicated through broken English has been so sensationalized throughout Hollywood, and other domains of the entertainment industry, that it has been relentlessly bound to Asian and Asian-American women alike.

Soo's character is just one example of how perceptions of Asian femininity are being constructed as hypersexual and deviant within Hollywood. A much more popularly-known actress, however, is Chinese-American Lucy Liu, who was brought up by all participants at some point in the interviews. On the other hand, only three of the participants had brought up Indian-American actress, Mindy Kaling, whose fame primarily started from the television series, *The Office* (2005-2013), and *The Mindy Project* (2012-present). Perhaps non-coincidentally, these

three participants who brought up Kaling in conversation were the only Indian-American participants in this study. However, the Indian-American participants in my study, Priya, Harini, and Anika, had contentious feelings about Kaling - although she is a well-known Indian-American actress, she tends to adopt a “color-blind” approach in her work. “Color-blindness” is a strategy often used in the media in order to incorporate bodies of color while simultaneously leaving out any race-specific narratives. While Priya, Harini, and Anika are able to identify with Kaling on some level because of her race, they still felt a disconnect in terms of what the Indian-American participants identified as “realistic” representations of Indian-American women’s experiences in the Contemporary U.S. For example, Priya stated, “I always understood that people like me weren’t represented in the media. Like Mindy Kaling, yeah she’s Indian but her Indian culture doesn’t reflect in her show at all, and that’s fine. But while we may share the same race, we don’t share that.” Harini made similar comments about Kaling, but specified her lack of identification with the actress because of how unrealistic Kaling’s on-screen romantic narratives were for Indian-American women who do not fit into the stereotypical idea of a “desirable” Asian woman. She stated:

Of course Mindy would go on T.V. and make it look like she’s fucking every white guy because she’s like, “well here [on T.V.] I can get it.” So I get it; it’s like sticking it to “the man,” but it’s not realistic - [Indian women] are not always going to end up with that white guy. I mean come on, like random white dudes on the train and you expect you’re just going to get it? (2016)

Harini’s perception of Kaling is linked to how she sees standards of beauty for Asian women being constructed in the U.S. media. Harini used Lucy Liu as an example of what an “attractive” Asian woman is expected to look like, and how this narrow construction often leads her to question her own value as an attractive or desirable Asian-American woman. Harini explained that as a darker-skinned Indian woman, she is not seen as stereotypically beautiful for an Asian-American:

That light skin, straight hair, and elegance is still something that is highly revered. So when I look at an Asian woman, sometimes it's like "oh fuck, is that what I'm supposed to look like?" Like that's *the* Asian. When everyone thinks of Asian they think of [Lucy Liu]. So then I wonder: where do I fall? Like I'm in this awkward bubble with a little bit of self hate, or maybe not hate, but yeah a little bit of hate because it's like a "fuck you" to me.

The scarcity of Asian-American women in Hollywood feeds into the lacking of diversity of Asian-American women in Hollywood. Both of these things often cause Asian-American women such as Harini to question their own desirability when they are not seeing Asian women that look like them being represented in the media. South Asian women are very rarely shown in Western media, and when they are, they typically adhere to the same kinds of Western beauty ideals - lighter skin tones, straight hair, pointed facial features, etc. The effects of western colonization can be seen here through the ways in which desirable femininity is white-washed while darker skin, darker hair, and larger body frames are associated with being backwards, poor, and excluded from modernity. As Harini mentions, Lucy Liu is what Western media constructs as an "attractive" Asian woman while other Asian women of different skin tones body types, and facial features are not similarly constructed as beautiful.

In addition to Southeast Asian women such as Liu being the stand-in for all "attractive" Asian women within the media, Liu is primarily known for her sexy, dominatrix roles in movies such as *Charlie's Angels* (2000) and *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003). This contributes to the idea that an "attractive" Asian woman is also one whose sexuality is considerably deviant and non-normative. As Shimizu theorizes in her chapter, "The Sexual Bonds of Racial Stardom,"

In the contemporary movie, *Charlie's Angels* (2000), Lucy Liu performs what may seem to be a racially unmarked character as one of the three highly accomplished professional female spies whose jobs involve masquerading in various racial and gendered forms. As a

masseuse at an Oriental establishment, she performs a massage with her feet in order to spy on a suspect. Costumed in a tube top mini-dress using the same thick, silky fabric as the cheong-sam and with chopsticks holding up her hair bun, she walks on Tim Curry's back before "knocking (him) unconscious" with her small foot on his neck. As a postmodern heroine, she is a dynamic playful figure, donning various costumes and characteristics (2007).

The characteristics that Shimizu is referencing are similar to that of both the Dragon Lady and the Lotus Flower archetypes. While Liu's "Oriental femininity" is translated through her costume, her femininity is eroticized as the Lotus Flower who is a seductive, servile masseuse for the white man, and is she is (re)eroticized as the Dragon Lady emerges when we remember that her disguise as the masseuse is merely a ploy to get the white man in a vulnerable position. As Shimizu analyzes, Liu's role in this scene displays a certain kind of "postmodern play" of stereotypes surrounding Oriental femininity. No longer simply bound by either the Lotus Flower or the Dragon Lady, Liu's character is able to interchangeably embody both hypersexual archetypes within the same moment (2007). On the one hand, such mobility between two archetypes suggests that Asian women on screen are developing new identities. On the other hand, we continue to see how Liu's character development is still bound by the perceived hypersexuality of the Dragon Lady and the Lotus Flower.

Likewise, when studying Liu's role as O-Ren Ishii in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, we can see the same double-embodiment that occurred in her role in *Charlie's Angels*. In *Kill Bill*, Liu plays a "half-breed, Chinese-American" whose position as the boss of the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad in Japan is regarded in the movie with both admiration and disdain by the other characters. As the only woman, the youngest member, and a "half-breed," we are lead to assume that her skills and success as an assassin are what earned her the spot of head-boss of the council. The scene in

which O-Ren Ishii's fearsomeness and power are most established takes place during a dinner meeting in which all of the male council members are seated around a long table with O-Ren seated at the head. Everyone at the table, except for one, is clapping before they happily begin chatting over food and drinks. Almost immediately, one of the men at the end of the table slams his fist down, breaking his plate of food. The disruption shocks the other council members who begin to yell at him for his out-burst. O-Ren, however, remains silent. She allows the angry council members to argue for before calmly interjecting. As the attention is redirected towards her, she kindly implores the displeased Boss Tanaka to share his feelings with the table. This almost maternalistic behavior presents O-Ren as a sweet woman who is concerned with the emotional well-being of the men she is surrounded by. However, this depiction of O-Ren as "sweet" is quickly dissolved as she jumps on the table and moves swiftly towards Boss Tanaka, draws her sword, and decapitates him after he expresses his hatred for her as a half-bred, American-born woman. A theatrical display of Boss Tanaka's blood spraying from his decapitated body is shown as the other council members are gasping in fear. The camera then narrows in on O-Ren as she eloquently places the sword back into its sheath, gives a powerful yet chilling speech to the council, and adjourns the meeting.



Lucy Liu in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003) as the head-boss, O-Ren Ishii. In this scene, Liu is depicted as a cold-blooded killer who leads an all-male group of Japanese assassins.

This scene from *Kill Bill Vol. 1* is symbolically similar to Caniff's depiction of the Dragon Lady in *Terry and the Pirates*. Similar to O-Ren, the Dragon Lady is the only woman in the pirate crew *and* she is the leader. Both the Dragon Lady and O-Ren can be interpreted as matriarchal figures in this sense, one who controls and guides a "family" of Asian men. For both the Dragon Lady and O-Ren, their feminities are made explicit by their clothing, body language, and tone of voice, yet they are simultaneously masculinized as danger and power are core elements of their characters. I also argue that it is within these representations of Asian women embodying masculine traits that we see the feminization of Asian men. As merely background characters of the Asian woman, the men are constructed as rather insignificant and agent-less. Such a construction of Asian masculinity within Western discourses works to reassert white masculinity, even when white male bodies are not present.

While eroticism is not as explicitly portrayed through O-Ren's character like it is deliberately exemplified in *Terry and the Pirates*, I argue that eroticism and hypersexuality have already been so deeply tied to Asian women in Western discourses that by the twenty-first century, O-Ren's character as an Asian female antagonist cannot be divorced from Orientalist perceptions of Asian

women as dangerous, deviant, and hypersexual. I also assert that the erotification of the Dragon Lady was made more explicit because of the time period in which *Terry and the Pirates* was created. Prior to the comic's creation, Asian immigrants in the U.S. had been regarded as sexually immoral, dangerous, and sneaky since the mid-1800's. The National Origins Act of 1924 reaffirmed hostile sentiments and a general distrust of Asian women as Americans were primarily perceiving them to be working as prostitutes or entering the U.S. as picture brides. However, to say that Liu's roles and the hypersexual representations of Asian-American women in Hollywood are wholly negative would be reductive and dismissive. Reductive in the sense that it reduces these implicitly ideologically complex representations of Asian women to a dualism which (re)homogenizes them by ignoring how Asian women themselves are (re)negotiating new identities in Hollywood; dismissive in the sense that if we deem the Dragon Lady and Liu's characters as entirely "good" or "bad," we potentially dismiss the positive experiences that Asian-American women can have when seeing viewing these characters. For example, Filipina-American Riley, who described herself as someone who was adventurous, outgoing, and "very aggressive," brought up moments from her childhood in which her and her white friends would "play-pretend" by reenacting scenes from *Charlie's Angels*. She talked about how she identified with Alex growing up, and that whenever her friends would tell her that she got to play Alex's character during games because they were both Asian, she would react in a very strong, positive manner. Riley perceived Alex as "a total badass" and not "traditional" because her character was dating an attractive white man in the movie. From the interviews, it was clear that Riley's positive perception of Liu in *Charlie's Angels* as a "badass" gave her a sense of pride, particularly when she was associated with Liu. As someone who obviously takes pride in having

a strong and confident sense of self as an adult, one can infer that as a child, Riley looked up to Liu's character because she was someone that was recognizably famous, that shared some of the same racial attributes, and represented someone that Riley interpreted as strong and empowered. On the other hand, however, Riley's perception of Liu's character as a positive representation because she dates a white man in the movie is implicative of Colonialist constructions of desirability. As I discuss in chapter four, many first-generation Asian children are verbally and non-verbally taught to view white partners as not simply acceptable, but as the ideal life-long partner. Referring back to Ono and Berg's assimilation hypothesis, the racial mixing between whites and Asians theoretically - and quite often in actuality - grants Asians more access into white-dominated spaces, thus giving the impression that racist/prejudice sentiments targeted at Asian individuals or the community have disappeared through an evolutionary-like process.

2.4 Creating counter-narratives: the use of Social Media to challenge homogenous representations of Asian-American women

While historically-grounded Western institutions such as Hollywood and the porn industry continuously (re)produce racial and gender ideologies, we must also consider the ways in which other technological advancements within the West are generating new spaces that these ideologies can be challenged and resisted. Social media is a space in which Asian-American women are (re)negotiating their gender and sexual identities by pushing back against stereotypes and recreating their own racial and gender narratives for the public to learn from. Social media has become such an inextricable facet of the internet within the 21st century. The Web 2.0 is conceptualized as a second-generation development whose content is collaborative and user-generated (Dictionary.com 2016). It is because of social media's collaborative and user-generated nature that it is more accurately described as a "curation" of individuals' lives, interests, and

politics rather than a “creation” to be viewed and consumed without regard to other contributing entities (Cho 2015). According to the Pew Research Center, in 2015, a recorded sixty-five percent of adults used social media - a nearly tenfold jump in the last 10 years (Perrin 2015). The dominant users of social media are reported to be young adults (ages eighteen to twenty-nine), who have higher education levels, and a higher household income. The Pew Research Center found that men and women use social media at comparable rates, while also recording little difference between social media users’ races (Perrin 2015). Within sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Tumblr, etc., consumers of content are also becoming the producers as they create their own videos, blogs, and posts that circulate around the internet. While social media sites are often used as means for mass communication, it has also proven itself to be a space in which new, complex understandings of personhood, politics, and community are being generated. While the Pew Research findings reported little racial variation amongst social media users, SMN has proven itself to be a popular arena in which socio-political issues concerning race, sexism, homophobia, and more are being confronted by individuals as well as communities of users. The homogenization of Asian-American women within Western discourses, for example, is challenged when Asian-American users themselves write and/or produce their own content to be viewed and consumed by all racialized users. According to Danah Boyd, the online spaces in which this content is being generated and shared are considered “network publics,” which is defined by Boyd as, “publics that are restructured by networked technologies.” According to Boyd, these publics are constructed through networked technologies such as the internet, and are an “imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice.” (Boyd 2011) Today, networked publics generated by Asian-American

women are being used to counter racial and gender stereotypes that are transpiring throughout Western discourses. While many of the Asian-American women on SMN are aware that Western society is still coded by the dominant ideologies that inform gendered racism, SMN still provides them a radical space of socio-political expression while also providing them concrete moments that legitimize their unique struggles as Asian-American women.

NBC Asian America, a sub-group of NBC T.V. network in New York City, focuses specifically on issues that impact the Asian-American community at large. I had first come across NBC Asian-America as I was scrolling through my Facebook newsfeed. After exploring their Facebook page, I found an abundance of videos, interviews, and online articles, all of which address issues or topics concerning Asian-Americans. Some of the posts had to do with Asian-American athletes, another post was of a video of President Obama delivering a speech and addressing the Asian-American community as he said, “We will live up to our ideals. We just have to keep speaking out against hatred and bigotry in all of its forms.” (NBC 2016) We also see a number of Facebook posts that speak out against the lack of representation of Asian-Americans in Hollywood, as well as the lack of diverse roles given to Asian-Americans in the U.S. media. The differing Facebook posts found on NBC Asian America’s page work to recenter the public’s attention onto Asian-Americans - a racial group within the United States whose community issues have often gone unacknowledged within Western discourses.

Facebook users’ individual profiles are often used as platforms to talk about the socio-political issues that concerns Asian-Americans today, whether they be “sharing” content from pages such as NBC Asian America or creating their own statuses. For example, after holding the interviews, Eliza had friend-requested me on Facebook. As a junior at Loyola University who is

quite active in conversations and organizations centered around social-justice, her posts are often used to communicate her socio-political viewpoints as it pertains to racism and sexism. Eliza and I often “like” and comment on each other’s Facebook activity, whether it be explicitly political statuses or simply funny pictures being shared. For many other Facebook users like us, liking and commenting on one’s post is often regarded as a sign of solidarity and support. As I was taking a break from writing, I scrolled through my newsfeed and came across a video that Eliza had posted - her caption read, “Relevant,” and the title of the video being shared was, “It’s Time to Stop Portraying Asian Women as Submissive Sex Objects.” The video created by ATTN⁷ uses clips from movies featuring Asian women in order to argue that Asian women are disproportionately hypersexualized in Hollywood and Western society at large. Bold, white letters on the screen spelled out descriptive words for Asian women such as “exotic,” “subservient,” and “controllable.” The video included interviews with Asian/Asian-American women who express the difficulties of dating men who have problematic perceptions about Asian women and their assumed sexualities. Anna Akana, whose YouTube channel has nearly 1.5 million subscribers, is also shown in this video as she says, “When the only prerequisite for me to become your potential partner is the color of my skin - that’s cheap. That’s offensive.” While not all of Akana’s YouTube videos discuss race, this particular video explicitly addressed men with “yellow fever,” while also speaking out against colonialist constructions of desirability that inform so many other Western discourses. ATTN’s video concluded with another portion of

⁷ ATTN is founded by Matthew Segal and Jarrett Moreno. This site is driven by content and depends on social media platforms for users to engage with the site and their mission, which states, “[To] inform and empower the next generation to make a social impact.” (ATTN 2016) For more information, please visit their site at <http://www.attn.com/about>

Akana's YouTube video⁸ as she flexes her both her arms, looks charmingly at the camera, and says in a sarcastic tone, "I'm sorry, but do these guns look like they're very 'submissive' to you?" This comedic conclusion works to (re)group viewers through the use of laughter which often works to remind us that others are sharing this experience with us, even as we watch the video alone.

By sharing of ATTN's video on Facebook with the caption "Relevant," Eliza made an important statement regarding how she is grappling with how her identity as an Asian-American woman is being constructed within the U.S. When I had asked her about her reasonings behind sharing the video on Facebook, she said:

I just decided to post [the video] because I feel like sometimes I'm pretty silent about my Asian identity, even in spaces where we are doing anti-racism work, and Facebook is sometimes the best outlet I think to raise certain issues and make them visible. I also wanted to put it out there for some of the men I'm friends with on Facebook who are super problematic with Asian fetishes.

We can see from her explanation that her post was influenced by her socio-political beliefs and desires as an Asian-American woman. Eliza shared the video as a way to speak out about her identity as an Asian woman, and also as an attempt to speak directly to the men whose behavior and attitudes she felt were problematic and oppressive. By sharing this post with deliberate intentions, Eliza (re)negotiated her identity by reasserting her relevancy within popular Western discourses. While Eliza's post received a total of twenty-one "likes" (including my own), the original video accumulated 29k "likes," 1.1k "angry" reactions, 705 "love" reactions, 131 "sad" reactions, 127 "laughing" reactions, and 119 "wow" reactions. Based on the immense amount of

⁸ Anna Akana's YouTube video, "Why Guys Like Asian Girls," will be discussed more in depth during chapter's five's discussion on how Asian-American women (re)negotiate their gender and sexual identities within intimate relationships.

Facebook reactions alone, we cannot get a detailed account of how users and viewers are actually engaging with ATTN's video. However, the "top comments" out of the 7.4k reveals how much Asian and other-non white users are also reasserting their relevancy by relating to the content of the video. One commenter said, "Okay but for real, I'm not even full Asian and men have said some straight on disgusting things to me about being Chinese. People have got to stop being gross and stupid, Asian doesn't mean sex toy and human beings are equal. Simple concepts here." A non-Asian commenter said, "As a Latina, I totally understand how my fellow Asian sisters feel. Google Latina and see what comes up. Or checkout #latina on Twitter or Instagram. We're hypersexualized and objectified as well. It sucks. Black women face many of these stereotypes as well. I have no advice to offer, only understanding and solidarity." Both of these comments garnered over one-thousand likes, and multitudes of replies that showed other people's similar support and sentiments. On the other hand, users who perpetuate gendered-racism also commented on ATTN's video. Immediately following the Latina user's comment, a white man commented, "I disagree, Asian women have standards... lots of respect for their bodies... not easy to date them... you can still get way with happy ending at massage spas." While it is a bit unclear what he is trying to articulate in the first parts of his comment, the last part explicitly plays on the stereotypical trope of Asian women as sex-workers disguised as masseuses. I was enthusiastic to find that this user's comment did not go unchallenged. An Asian commenter (their ethnicity and nationality are not specified in their comment) replied back, "I think you're trying [to get] brownie points by giving some empowerment to Asian women, then your very next sentence is a stereotype, fetish, and racism rolled into one. [Good job] asshole, at least u tried." This user, and many others, exemplify how the comments section within social

media platforms are rich sites in which the challenging of oppressive, dominating Western ideologies are generated. For myself and many others, social media platforms such as the comment section of ATTN's video are so remarkable because the ways in which community resistance is generated between complete strangers, thus dissolving the barricades that one's physical location had previously imposed before social media was created. Social media allows users to connect in a socio-political manner regardless of what state or country they live in, and even more significantly, they can connect with each other at increased rates and speeds. For Asian-American women, social media has provided the opportunity to locate others that identify with the same issues. The intersecting of shared interests and experiences on social media platforms often generates what Alexander Cho calls "networked affect." Affect is often conceptualized as moments of great emotional intensity and emergence, and is often inextricably linked to the idea of assemblage which is a way of thinking of multiplicity, multidimensionality, and interconnectedness (Cho 2015). Therefore SMN and the subgroups within these sites are representative of an assemblage of different and shared identities, and it is within these assemblages that affect manifests itself via the sharing of emotional experiences stemming from racist, sexist, and/or homophobic oppression. Discovering others with shared experiences can be an extremely empowering moment, particularly when there has been a lot of silence around the kinds of oppression experienced by Asian-American women.

2.5 Conclusion: Making ties between pornography, Hollywood, and social media in the larger context of this project

Eliza's post and ATTN's video are just a few examples of how Asians/Asian-American women are taking the gendered racism transpiring throughout contemporary Western discourses into their own hands and instead working to create counter-narratives. While the first sections of

this chapter focuses on how Asian women are often portrayed in a homogenous manner that constructs them as hypersexual, submissive, and exotic, we must also taken into account how Asian women themselves are challenging these harmful notions on other media platforms. I argue that this acknowledgement is far more important and beneficial when working to end gendered racism. Without the acknowledgement of individual agency and autonomy, Asian-American women would be (re)marginalized as agent-less beings who hold no potential for radical socio-political change. As we can see from SMN users as well as from the women that will be discussed throughout this study, each one maintains and continues to produce a great deal of radical potential as they speak out against oppressive Western institutions.

Utilizing content and discourse analyses in conjunction with the comments of very real people such as Eliza and the other Facebook users, we can also see how Asian/Asian-American women are (re)negotiating their racialized gender and sexual identities. On the one hand, women such as Eliza make it very clear that they are aware of how the contemporary U.S. utilizes the media to transpire these racist and sexist messages, which then contributes to the behavior of many men with problematic “Asian fetishes,” as Eliza puts it. On the other hand, these same women are taking it upon themselves and the communities that they build online to challenge and complicate gendered racism. As we move on to the following chapters that discuss intergenerational and intimate relationships, the discussion and analyses on the U.S. media will continue to inform the ways in which we conceptualize Asian-American women in other settings. More importantly, however, this chapter’s discussion will inform the ways in which we perceive the Asian-American women in the following chapters as cognizant agents of their own identities and futures.

Chapter Three

(Re)negotiating Gender and Sexual Identities Through Intergenerational Relationships

As a twenty-two year old who continues to grapple with my gender and sexual identities as an Asian-American woman, I attribute a large portion of my perception and attitudes about sexuality to the repetitive conversations I had with my Filipina-immigrant mother. While my mother and I continue to hold very different beliefs in terms of sexual liberation, premarital sex, and non-heteronormative sexualities, the verbal and non-verbal lessons taught to me greatly shaped the process in which I have come to construct my sexual agency and identity. Growing up, notions surrounding “respectable” femininity, Filipino culture, and sexual morality were not mutually exclusive. In contrast, each concept continued to inform one another as both my parents implemented the “no dating” rule all throughout high school, as they went the extra mile to ensure that a female chaperone would be present if co-ed activities were happening at a friend’s house, as my mother monitored how “revealing” my clothes were, and especially how she talked about those “American” girls who were “loose” and “easy.”

For many Asian-Americans, the home is where initial lessons on how to perform gender and sexuality are communicated. While this can be said for all other racial groups, Asian-Americans’ intergenerational conversations within immigrant households tend to place an increased emphasis on sexual purity for daughters, heteronormativity as the only option in terms of sexual orientation, and gender performance that adheres to one’s assigned-at-birth sex (Chou 2012). This is the case for many of the women in my study, although as this chapter discusses, the

experiences of transracially adopted and mixed-race women complicate past studies that have perceived Asian-American women as experiencing the same kinds of intergenerational relationships with their immigrant parents. By analyzing the empirical research conducted on Asian-American women's communicative experiences with Asian-immigrant parents, white parents, or both, this discussion unveils the ways in which Asian-American women's gender and sexual identities have been informed, and continue to be informed, by their parents. A discussion that includes a wide range of Asian-American women with different familial backgrounds also works to deconstruct the "Asian family" as it has been constructed in a homogenous fashion within the U.S.

3.1 Looking Behind the Curtain: How socio-economic and immigration status influence Asian-American women's experiences

Harini sits cross-legged on the floor of my living room. On the white coffee table that divides us, half-eaten sandwiches, cups of water, and the audio recording device for the interview are spread out. She looks to the upper right-hand corner of her eyes with her lips slightly pursed as she contemplates an answer to my question, "What does being an Asian-American woman mean to you?" She looks back at me with a serious yet soft expression - one that I have come to view as very representative of Harini's overall calm demeanor - and says, "Confused - I don't think Indian women easily fall into that category. And there's also immigrant pride. It's just another category that I never really felt a part of." As a twenty-three year old, self-identifying Indian-American woman who grew up in the north side of Chicago, Harini conceptualizes her racial and gender identities as never quite belonging, as "excluded." Her feelings of misplacement are attributed to her being raised by immigrant parents in a working-class household. Growing up with both parents and a brother nearly ten years her senior, Harini spoke the most fondly about

her mother throughout the interview and appeared to have a great deal of empathy and compassion for her. According to Harini, growing up with an immigrant Indian mother was not always easy, and it was not until young-adulthood that she began to view her mother as a far more complex person than she had growing up:

My mom was definitely the stricter one. When you're growing up in [Indian] families, the dad just kind of dictates so the mom has to advocate for his strictness. As a woman, when you're growing up and you look to your mom to connect but in your head she's just this woman who says "no" to everything, or won't even entertain a conversation about like a boy you like at school or something like that...that's just how it works in Indian families. But as I got older I realized that my mom's opinions and what she was actually telling me were two different things. That's when we got closer. It took me leaving for college to understand how we spoke from a distance.

As a child and adolescent, Harini viewed her mother as the enforcer of her father's rules. In this sense, Harini's mother was seen as a key part of reinforcing patriarchal order within their household, which often left Harini unable to see her as a woman that she could relate or speak to, particularly when it concerned boys at school. It was not until adulthood that Harini began to reconceptualize her mother's advocacy for her father's orders as a way to maintain peace in their household while encouraging her daughter to establish her own agency in other ways. When speaking about her mother's experience as an immigrant in the U.S., Harini mentioned a very important lesson that she continues to keep in mind as she navigates her way throughout contemporary western discourses:

[My mom] raised me with this thing of "look behind the curtain," otherwise you're just going to get stuck. Within the first few years of her being here, my mom had to file taxes, so she read the entire tax book, did her own taxes, and then she started charging other people so do theirs. From the get-go, my mom was like "learn the system and use it in your favor. So "look behind the curtain" means just that - don't just take what's being given to you. Understand where its coming from and see where you can use it to leverage yourself.

Her mother's strategy of "looking behind the curtain" can be seen as a counter-colonialist action, one that appropriates the first phase of Frantz Fanon's colonial model in order for the colonized to (re)assert their agency. Discussing Fanon's model, Filipino-American postcolonial psychology theorist, E.J.R. David, Ph.D., described the first phase of the colonial model as, "the forced entry of a foreign group into a geographic territory with the intention of exploiting the new territory's natural resources." (David 2013) By learning an important part of the U.S. economic system and using it to her advantage, Harini's mother found a way to establish her belongingness as an immigrant within the U.S., while also ensuring that her American-born children would have access to the same resources as other Americans. Therefore, looking back as an adult, Harini now interprets her mother's behavior as strategic and conscious. Based off of Harini's retelling of stories, it is quite clear that her mother was cognizant of her own positionality as an immigrant woman with a family to support. By acknowledging the significance in lessons such as "looking behind the curtain," Harini is able to understand how her mother's agency as an Indian-American woman was constantly being (re)negotiated in order to provide Harini and her brother opportunities for success as first-generation U.S. citizens.

For transracially adopted Asian-American women who were raised by white parents, "looking behind the curtain" was not a necessity because the curtain was already drawn for them. For example, Eliza and her sister were born in South Korea but were adopted as infants and raised in Minnesota by their white adoptive parents. Even though Eliza acknowledges that she is technically an immigrant because she was born outside of the U.S., she still finds it difficult to claim an immigrant identity because she did not experience the same kinds of challenges that more "traditional" Asian immigrants faced:

I think I grew up with a lot of privilege because both of my parents are white, so in a way, that privilege is passed down to me in terms of the access that they had, I also had. So technically, even though I'm an immigrant to the U.S. I still came with all of this privilege. My family wasn't working to get citizenship, you know? I came as already a citizen, and it's interesting to see how that's played out I guess. For example, sometimes you'll do "diversity step-ins" and they'll say, "If you immigrated into this country then step in," and I'll always hesitate because I don't know if I can claim that narrative of the struggle to assimilate and become stable.

Eliza recognizes the privileges that were afforded to her because of her middle-upper class white parents, yet she is also cognizant of the ways in which she is excluded from certain narratives because of her identity as a trans-racially adopted, Asian-American woman. The experiences of the transracially adopted Asian-American women will be discussed more in-depth later on in this chapter, however, Eliza's recognition of how societal privilege is afforded in accordance to one's immigration narrative exemplifies how differently Asian-American are perceiving/being perceived by Western society. Even though Harini was American-born and Eliza was not, Harini's Indian immigrant parents with a working-class background often present Harini as more of a "foreigner" than Eliza. While both women are obviously not white, Eliza's familial ties to "professional" white parents grants her invisibility in certain spaces that Harini and her family would be hyper-visible.

3.2 "Just a look": Communicating non-verbally about boys, sexuality, and relationships

As exemplified by Harini's parents, cognizance of one's disenfranchisement as immigrants in the U.S. can also lead to a sense of mistrust towards Americans and American culture. In "Colonial Mentality: Psychological Impact of Colonialism," from E.J.R. David's book, *Brown Skin, White Minds: Filipino -/ American Postcolonial Psychology*, David explains how *cultural mistrust* is a common way for the marginalized to react to oppression. As the theoretical opposite

of colonial mentality, cultural mistrust refers to an overall distrust of the dominant group and the institutions that they control (David 2013). For Harini's parents, mistrust for American culture was predominantly centered around a mistrust for American boys. Although Harini identifies as queer (still unbeknownst by her parents today), her father often saw teenaged boys as a threat when Harini was growing up. Harini shared memories of her father picking her up from school and what it was like if boys were ever around her: "If there were any boys by me, [my dad] would be like, 'take fucking three steps to the side!' Like, they should never be anywhere near my bubble when my dad pulls up!" While Harini laughed at the thought of her father scaring away boys at school, it was clear that any presumed romantic interaction with the boys was admonished by her father and viewed as unacceptable. While teenage boys are continuously accepted as sexual beings overrun by testosterone and driven by a need to assert their masculinity, teenage girls are contrastingly constructed as their sexual prey, vulnerable to the trickery of boys and men (Garcia 2012). When combining this gendered notion of sexual agency with cultural mistrust, immigrant parents such as Harini's often viewed intimate relationships with American boys with heightened paranoia. For this reason, Harini never had open discussions with either parent about sex, sexuality, or dating.

Boys - that was always the biggest thing. And it was never a conversation, it was just a look. Like if you brought up a boy's name, you could just feel the room get all tense, and then you learn that this is just something that you can't share with parents.

When comparing this kind of non-verbal communication to her non-Indian friends and their parents, Harini noticed a clear difference as she explained, "It didn't feel like they had as many filters. It just kind of felt like they could talk about anything." When elaborating on the

difference between her family and her friends' families, she explained that the difference was because, "We're not American, we're not like them." Harini continued on to explain,

When you get your idea of what it means to be a white American from Jerry Springer or something like that, or like Lifetime, my parents just had this idea that white kids were druggies and disrespectful to their elders, and that they didn't know how to do work because they just partied all the time.

Harini's parents were perceiving American culture as morally and ethically inferior to Indian culture, equating Americanness to "trashy" television shows such as Jerry Springer or highly dramatized T.V. networks such as Lifetime. Her parents' attitudes regarding Americans as "disrespectful" and "druggies" can also be seen as countering colonialist ideologies that construct the colonized as wild, savage, and uncivilized (David 2013) by (re)locating these negative connotations onto the bodies of the dominant group. As exemplified by early U.S. immigration laws that excluded Asian immigrants, dominant western discourses historically constructed Asian immigrants as morally inferior and as a societal corruption, therefore when immigrant families such as Harini's (re)position themselves as superior to Americans within household conversations, this can be regarded as a strategy to (re)generate cultural pride while simultaneously positioning themselves as superior to the dominant group. To further exemplify this point, Yen Le Espiritu's chapter, "'We Don't Sleep around like White Girls Do': Family, Culture, and Gender in Filipina American Lives," focuses on how the sexual-identities of Filipina-American women are often used as sites by their immigrant families to assert cultural superiority over Americans:

Female morality - defined as women's dedication to their families and sexual restraints - is one of the few sites where economically and politically dominated groups can construct the dominant group as other and themselves as superior. Because womanhood is idealized as the repository of tradition, the norms that regulate women's behaviors

becomes a means of determining and defining group status and boundaries (Espiritu 2001).

Similar to the Filipino immigrant parents discussed by Espiritu, Harini's parents' cultural mistrust for American boys can be attributed to the perceived threat that the boys' pose on Harini's sexual purity. As Espiritu continues to explain, "the burden and complexities of cultural representation fall most heavily on immigrant women and their daughters." (Espiritu 2001) Therefore as daughters' sexualities are at risk of being "corrupted," the integrity of the family and their culture is similarly compromised. The task of generating sexual agency or exploring one's sexuality becomes quite difficult when such demanding expectations are placed onto Asian/Asian-American women and girls. Harini's inability to openly discuss topics surrounding intimacy with her parents are problematized even further when considering her queer sexual identity. For Harini, the act of talking about romantic relationships in front of her parents is a difficult task alone. At the time of the interview, Harini shared feelings of being "overwhelmed" by the thought of bringing up her queer identity to her parents.

Conversations surrounding intimacy and sexuality with her mother in particular can be seen as a difficult task for Harini because of the ways in which she has come to view her parents' marriage as lacking in intimacy. Arranged marriages are widely practiced by many Indians and Indian-Americans, and they often produce the same successful and loving companionships that we see in non-arranged marriages. In contrast to the U.S. media's representations of arranged marriages as oppressive, archaic, and cold, many Indian-American women find happiness in their arranged marriages, and often see them as a positive alternative to the "dating culture" predominantly associated with the Western customs. However, when describing her parents' marriage, Harini said,

My parents had an arranged marriage. I knew that they've had sex twice, obviously, because there's me and my brother, but they stopped sleeping in the same room maybe when I was around eight or nine. From a very early age, they weren't affectionate or loving towards each other in any way, but that never stuck in my mind like, "oh, this is what relationships should be like." It was more like, "this is how relationships *shouldn't* be like. It wasn't normalized for me.

Harini understands her parents' lack of intimacy as a flaw in their relationship rather than a "normal" part of marriage. She conceptualizes her parents' lack of intimacy with each other as "abnormal," and sees affection and companionship as important parts of healthy romantic relationships. Although Harini identified more with her mother, it may have been difficult for Harini as an adolescent to open up to her mother about her romantic relationships. Moreover, while it was not specified by Harini, it is possible that her own silence about her queer identity with her mother is partially attributed to years of observing her own mother's silence when it came to her perceptions of intimacy and romantic relationships. If silence dominates conversations on intimacy and sexuality within intergenerational relationships, it would not be unrealistic for Asian-American women such as Harini to feel as though they are lacking in the necessary tools to effectively communicate their feelings and desires with future romantic partners as well as their families.

Unlike Harini, Priya recalled a memory of her mother attempting to initiate "the talk" during her adolescence. "The talk" is often understood as a conversation between parent and child with the intended goal being sex/sexual-education. For Riley, she explained how her mother never explicitly brought up "the talk" with her, but assumed that she already knew what sex was from her friends and the T.V. While Priya described their mother's attempt to talk to her about sex as unwanted and awkward, the decision to not have conversations about sexuality was primarily

made by her. This does not mean to say, however, that Priya is not influenced by an immigrant mentality that relies on the sexual-morality of first-generation daughters in order to reassert one's cultural superiority over Americans. On the contrary, attitudes towards her white peers' sexual behaviors and dating patterns exemplify how Priya has adopted the idea that white Americans are lacking in morality. An immigrant mentality that perceives white women as sexually "loose" and irresponsible can be found in the ways that Priya describes her white friends' sexual habits as "regretful" and as a misguided way of expressing their internal emotions. When I had asked Priya to clarify whether this "regret" was expressed by her friends themselves, or if she was interpreting their sexual experiences as regretful, she stated, "I mean, I can't really speak for them. But definitely for me I see them and I see that [sex] doesn't fix anything. Maybe short term...but we all know that long term, [sex] won't solve anything." Priya's perception of her white friends misusing sex as a means to "solve" their problems while she claims to rely more on logic and intellect can exemplify how her Indian identity is distinguished from her friend's American identities, even though she does consider herself an Indian-American. In these moments of cultural distinction, Priya consciously aligns herself more with the culture that she perceives as being morally and intellectually superior. Such a perception reworks and problematizes the "us/them" binary - while western society historically constructs Priya and her immigrant family as racial Others, Priya's own configuration of the binary allows her to recast western culture and white women as the inferior Other to her Indian culture. Similar to Priya, Riley discussed learning about sex and intimate relationships primarily through observing her friends' experiences of "trial and error." Riley's mother's assumption that she already learned about sex through observing the "errors" of her white friends could be similarly explained by

Riley's Filipina mother's interpretation of her daughter being better at deciphering "right" from "wrong" unlike her white friends. During the interview, Riley explained that her and her mother still have a very close relationship that is not dependent on her mother constantly monitoring her. When I had asked her why she thought her mother took this approach, she simply said, "because she trusts I won't do anything stupid." Riley's indirect reference to her friends' "trial and errors" when exploring intimacy and sexuality as unintelligent is similar to Priya's interpretation of her white friends' behavior as unintellectual and misguided.

Historically, the sexuality of subordinate groups (particularly women of color) has been constructed and articulated by the dominant groups (Espiritu 2001), yet we see Asian immigrant families and Asian-American daughters redirecting a critical gaze onto white bodies. The redirecting of the gaze, which was primarily utilized by western colonizers in order to control and dominate over colonized bodies, allows immigrant families and Asian-American women to counter colonialist and orientalist notions framing Asian women as hypersexual and deviant. While on the one hand, the countering of colonialist and orientalist ideologies can be positive and empowering, we must also acknowledge the ways in which internalized racism informs Asian/Asian-American women's perception surrounding their own sexual expression, as well as immigrant held perceptions on white female sexuality. As the daughters of immigrant parents that entered the United States as "professionals" in the 1980's, their identities as Asian-Americans continue to be heavily influenced by the construction of the Model Minority. In order to successfully embody the status of a desirable immigrant, the Model Minority, Asian immigrants must continuously work to divorce themselves from orientalist understandings of Asians as backwards, barbaric, and perverse. By continuously engaging in a process of resisting

orientalist constructions of Asian femininity, Asian/Asian-American women partake in a (re)negotiation of their gender and sexual identities as they navigate between the hypersexualized Dragon Lady/Lotus Flower and the desexualized Model Minority. Alice, a Chinese-American freshman at University of Illinois at Chicago, talked about how her friends from high school had always assumed that she was asexual. When asked they thought that, Alice reasoned, “I guess it’s because they never heard me talk about guys or girls. All of my friends had crushes or were hooking up with someone, but I just never really talked about it.” Communication between Alice and her parents focused on academic achievement while completely negating conversations on sexuality and dating. Similar to Alice, communication between Priya, Riley, and their respective parents primarily focused on getting good grades in school.

When bound by the colonialist expectations of being sexually uncontrollable or the more contemporary reading of Asians as asexual, Asian-American women’s ability to fully explore their sexual identities is severely compromised. Combine these Western perceptions of Asian women with the highly self-monitoring immigrant mentality learned from their parents, Asian-American women are constantly (re)negotiating their gender and sexual identities as they interchangeably interact with both sides of their cultural and racial identities. In certain moments, identifying more with their Asian identity allows them to feel superior to their white peers while they can also feel more in-tuned with their immigrant family’s ideals. On the other hand, identifying more with their immigrant family’s ideals can cause Asian-American women to feel disconnected from their predominantly white social groups.

3.3 Sexual-Agency, Parenting Styles, and Guilt: Negotiating racial, gender, and sexual identities in adoptive families

Feelings of cultural dissonance are not only experienced by Asian-American women with immigrant families. The transracially adopted women in this study expressed major feelings of displacement and identity fragmentation, and in certain situations, with much more severity than Asian-American women with immigrant parents. In contrast to the participants with immigrant parents, however, the transracially adopted women were often raised in an environment where open-communication and individual agency were more explicitly encouraged. While Harini's mother taught her how to "look behind the curtain" as a way to generate economic and social mobility, "looking behind the curtain" is inherently tied to a collective immigrant mentality that (re)positions themselves as racialized Others within the U.S. On the other hand, eighteen year old, Laila's adoptive parents explicitly encouraged her to go against the grain and develop a completely individual sense of self. Laila shared with me one of the most prevailing messages her parents had communicated with her growing up: "You are always your own person, and there's always that status quo. If you don't feel like you fit into that, don't conform to other people just to fit in." Laila continued on to describe herself as very outgoing and individualistic, attributing such traits to her parents' ability to be good at not "stifling" her individuality and always being very supportive of her.

Without a doubt, Laila presented herself as a very outgoing, self-assured, and driven young woman. As a freshman at DePaul University, Laila spoke very animatedly about her goals of attending medical school, her friends and family back in Minnesota, as well as her love for the outdoors. I was immediately astounded by Laila's ability to contribute very nuanced and well-articulated thoughts about gender, race, and romantic relationships. Perhaps what contributed to

her ability to openly discuss sexuality and romantic relationships was her parent's consistent "open door" policy concerning conversations throughout her childhood and adolescence. While Laila's parents have been divorced since she was two years old, she has always maintained a very close relationship with both parents. In terms of how her parents communicated to her about sex and intimate relationships, Laila described both parents as being very communicative in terms of what they wanted from/for her, but they also acknowledged that she was her own person who could make her own decisions: "For my mom, it was more of, 'I want you to be happy, and I want you to be safe.' So my mom was always like, 'If you do have sex then use protection. If you do go out, then be safe. Just take the precautions about doing what you want.'" Laila continued on to explain what it was like when her mom initially approached her:

My mom was like, "Are you choosing to have sex? What are you doing, or what are you feeling?" I said no, I wasn't. At that time, I felt that unless I was really connected to a person then I wouldn't [have sex], and being so young, like fourteen or fifteen years old, I just didn't really want to.

In this interaction, her mother constructed Laila's sexual autonomy, safety, and emotions on equal levels of importance. By asking Laila what she was "choosing" to do and how she was feeling about her decisions, her mother indirectly communicated to Laila that she viewed her as an autonomous adult who was in charge of her body and her feelings.

It wasn't until sophomore year that I was dating someone, so that's when it was brought up again, and my dad actually talked to me about it for the first time. He was like, "I was a teenage boy once..." and I was like, "Oh, God!" [My parents] are much older, so they realize there's a big generation gap between us. They've always been like, "This is our perspective, but we know that you have your own." My dad, more so than my mom, was raised Catholic. So he would be like, "These are my beliefs, and this is what I want from you, but I can't force you to do anything." My mom was a little more lenient than that. She would say, "I can tell you this or that, but I know that you're going to do what you want, and I don't want you to feel like if you don't listen that you're going to feel

repercussions from us just because you didn't listen. I don't want you to feel guilty or bad about that."

Similar to Harini's father, Laila's dad perceived teenage boys as sex-crazed and a possible danger to his teenage daughter. However, Laila's father verbally communicated these feelings with her while also acknowledging Laila's sexual agency and ability to make her own decisions. Laila recalled a moment in which her father said, "Boys are bad. They're going to want to pursue you in a sexual manner, and you don't have to do these things, but you also can if you want to." Her father's acknowledgement that Laila may want to be sexually active worked to (re)affirm Laila's sexual agency. However, his comment that "boys are bad" possibly problematized Laila's ability to fully exercise her sexual agency without limitations. While her father acknowledged her ability to make her own decisions, he indirectly communicated that if she were to choose to engage sexually with boys then that may also make her "bad."

In addition, "guilt" is used by Laila's mother in a very different way than guilt is utilized by many Asian immigrant parents. For Laila, her mother structured their conversations in ways that were careful to not elicit feelings of shame or guilt within Laila. For example, her mother had said, "I don't want you to feel like if you don't listen that you're going to feel repercussions from us just because you didn't listen. I don't want you to feel guilty or bad about that." By establishing this perspective, her mother also communicated that Laila's individual decisions were her own, and would not change how her parents would feel about her. Their perception is indicative of a western mentality that emphasizes the individual rather than the group. For first-generation Asian-American women, however, guilt is often used by immigrant parents in order to instill cultural/family values within their children by promoting the idea that if their child should disobey their wishes and/or expectations, they risk disappointing their parents. For many first-

generation Asian-Americans, their immigrant families are where the group mentality is reconfigured within the U.S. Furthermore, Asian-American women who do not adhere to their immigrant parents' expectations often risk feelings of alienation and isolation by their family members. For Harini and Priya, intergenerational guilt has always informed conversations about sex, academic achievement, and physical appearance. When explaining how her parents used guilt as an implicit means of encouraging her to abide by their expectations, Priya discussed how fear of disappointing her parents continues to influence her behavior as a college student - if she does not receive good grades or participate in enough extra curricular activities, she risks disappointing her family. "It's not that my parents explicitly gave me standards, but the example that was set for me was very clear. So not meeting those examples or expectations would inherently result in me feeling guilty about disappointing them." Priya's enrollment in a Master's program at DePaul, her commitment to a number of university organizations, and her overwhelming day to day schedule lead her to place intimacy and romantic relationships at the bottom of her priority list. In this sense, Priya maintains a mindset that she feels her immigrant parents have raised her with.

Harini shared similar thoughts of intergenerational guilt while also explaining how self and group alienation is the price she has paid for resisting family/cultural expectations. According to Harini, a "good Indian girl" is one that, "goes to temple, respects their parents, has a job, has a Master's degree, and isn't dating." While Harini has a college degree and is employed full-time, she does not feel like she fits into this construction of a "good Indian girl" like her cousins do. She described her female cousins living similar lifestyles as they all made plans to go to school for medicine or engineering, while also making sure to stay close to home. Due to Harini's

very different ambitions than her cousins that included traveling the world, moving out of state, and exploring alternative careers outside of the traditional white-collared job market, Harini still tends to feel separated from her cousins:

[My cousins] would be like, “oh, my dad would never let me do that,” or, “my family wouldn’t be cool with that so I’m not even going to entertain that idea.” And for me it was like, how far can I push that conversation before I’m just like attacking my cousins, you know? It’s like being the Rottweiler of the family. I just had to accept that that’s their thing, and I have my own thing. But then I left for college and they stayed in the area so they got much closer, so when I came back with my goofy Liberal Arts degree and they’re all like on their paths and dating other brown men and going to med school...if anything it alienated me from my extended family.

Harini’s decision to live a lifestyle and obtain an education that moved away from her family’s normal path, resulted in her feeling distanced from her cousins that she grew up with. While Harini is happy with the decisions she has made throughout her life, she still feels a sense of loss as her interests and values creates a barrier between her and the rest of her family, who continue to live cohesive, “traditional lifestyles. Similar to other first-generation Asian-American women, Harini sometimes fears that the growing distance between her and her extended family is representative of her losing parts of her Indian culture.

The feelings of guilt and loss are common for first-generation Asian-Americans as well as for immigrant parents who raise their children as “American.” In order to cope with such negative feelings, many immigrant families rely on each other and cultural traditions in order to resist total assimilation to Western culture. Cooking food from their countries of origin, as well as teaching the native language to their American-born children, are common ways that immigrant families resist total assimilation and maintain cultural intactness (David 2013). Cultural traditions practiced within immigrant families help maintain their group identity, allowing each member a

sense of belongingness even when they do not receive that in white-dominated spaces such as work or school. However, for transracially adopted individuals such as Marisa, she often finds herself unable to feel a total sense of belonging within white and Asian spaces. Marisa describes herself as being “racially white, ethnically Chinese.” She refers to her racial identity as white because she was raised by white parents, therefore her socially constructed racial identity is in adherence with theirs, and her biological parents are Chinese. Marisa’s cognizance of her complex racial/ethnic identities gives her a nuanced lens through which she views and negotiates with Western society. On the other hand, Marisa described feeling “ungodly uncomfortable” and “really ashamed” when she interacts with Asian-Americans raised by Asian parents. Marisa feels as though she cannot fully relate to them because she was not raised with an intact sense of “Asian” culture. When describing her contentious feelings that arise when speaking with other Asian-American women, she said:

I would love to have a friend who can identify with the struggle of being an Asian-American woman, but at the same time, I really don’t want to be grouped as “one of the Asians.” And if I did go to their houses and they had Asian parents who made this Asian dish, I would feel guilty that I don’t have that. So then how Asian am I?

Marisa’s perception of Asianness as being measured by how familiar one is with “Asian” food symbolizes her awareness as someone who she feels is still an outsider, while also re-homogenizing Asian culture. While it is clear that this was not Marisa’s intent, her description of Asian cultures as a single entity, which she feels she is often excluded from, is implicative of colonialist and orientalist ideologies that construct Asians as a monolithic group within the Western imaginary. As an Asian-American woman that was raised by white parents, one cannot blame Marisa for internalizing these understandings of Asians. While Laila was also raised by

white parents, the presence of numerous foreign of exchange students from South Korea throughout her childhood helped her feel a sense of Korean cultural identity. According to Laila, these foreign exchange students at the nearby university would stay with her family for a period of time, and they were described as, “[Like] my older siblings who could teach me things that my parents or family couldn’t teach me. I learned a lot about the culture in South Korea, and even a little bit of the language. These are just things that my parents couldn’t teach me.”

Unlike Marisa, Laila was able to establish a more concrete connection to her South Korean identity because she had a type of surrogate-sibling relationship with individuals from South Korea.

Transracially adopted Asian-American women show us how complex identities and experiences are when race and ethnicity do not align so simply. As Chinese or South Korean women who were raised by white parents in predominantly white neighborhoods, Laila, Marisa and Eliza continuously deal with feelings of displacement. For Eliza, making friends with other Asian-American women helped create a space of belongingness. Vi, who is half-Filipina and half-white, is one of Eliza’s friends whom she can talk to about feelings and experiences that her white parents would not be able to understand. Because Vi is half white, she can relate to Eliza’s experiences of cultural/racial/ethnic division to an extent. However, their different socio-economic backgrounds and relationships with their parent(s) contribute to the ways in which their racial, gender, and sexual identities have formed. For Eliza, who is very close to her self-identifying gay father, she feels that her dad is generally open to conversations concerning relationships and dating, although she personally does not feel like those are conversations she wants to have with her father. In addition to Eliza’s preference on not talking to her dad about her

intimate life, she described him as not being overly-invasive and still maintaining a clear division between being her peer and her father. Vi's (white) mother, on the other hand, was described by Vi as acting too much like her peer and not enough as a mother. Vi's idea of a mother is one who disciplines and sets boundaries for her daughters, which is opposite of her own mother.

My mom is too open about things, and I hate it so much. This is also one of the contentions that I have with my mom, and it's that she's always tried way too much to be [my sister and I's] friend and never mothered us. She didn't care if I was out every night, and that was her way of saying, "I trust you," but to me, it was like, "why don't you care?" I had friends whose moms were always texting them and asking them why they weren't home or something, and it seemed like my mom didn't care even though I know now that was her way of being a good parent. She would also always openly talk about [sex], about those kinds of things, and I hated it. When I was fourteen there was a scandal, and this is one of my least favorite memories, but I stole my best friend's boyfriend, and there were some things involved....my mom made a joke about it because she heard from my sister. She said, "why couldn't you wait until I could teach you with a banana and everything?"

Vi's "scandal" during her adolescence had to do with an awkward sexual experience with her friend's boyfriend that ended up circulating around town. Vi still feels quite traumatized by the experience and attributes a lot of negative feelings to her mother's inability to react appropriately.

[The scandal] is actually why I try to never go back to Pekin. I just feel like people still remember me as the person who does this or that. There were also rumors that made it so much worse, and my mom's reaction wasn't, "Oh, I'm so sorry that everyone hates you now." Her only thought was, "Oh, I didn't get to teach you!" I was only fourteen and I didn't want my mom to teach me to do those things. I wanted her to be like, "you shouldn't be doing these things."

While Vi personally believes that sexuality is a powerful means of expression, and should be utilized however the individual chooses, her past experiences coupled with her mother's lack of parental guidance caused Vi to feel shame and embarrassment when looking back at her past sexual experience. Vi conceptualized her mother's parenting approach and communication style to her mom's underlying wish of Vi being more "feminine" like she was in high school.

When she was growing up, she was like the ideal high school girl. She was blonde, huge boobs, weighed like ninety pounds, was the star cheerleader. Things like that. My sister and I did cheerleading as kids but never stuck with it, and that's something that she brings up all the time. I did Latin club in high school, and speech and theater, and I know that always bothered her that I wasn't like the popular cheerleader and things like that. So when I was doing my "hoe phase" at fourteen and fifteen years old, that was the closest I ever got to what my mom was in high school. I feel like she was more proud of me then than when I found speech or other things that made me happy.

It is within Vi's description of her and her mother's relationship that we see how race, gender, and sexuality are being negotiated between mother and daughter. Vi's description of her mother being the "ideal" high school girl was very racially coded. Being blonde, petite, having large breasts, and cheerleading paints a stereotypical picture of the "girl-next-door," one who can be found as the romantic female leads in American movies. Because Vi's half-Filipino background gave her and her sister brown skin and black hair, they were both unable to fulfill the image of the "ideal" high school girl. However, Vi's "promiscuity" was able to compensate for those things for her mother who equated sexual-desirability to "successful" adolescent femininity. Furthermore, her mother's inability to understand how Vi and her sister were sexualized differently because of their non-white racial identity often caused Vi to feel distanced from her mother at times. As Vi expressed, even though her mom has children that are of color, that did not mean that she was able to understand the experiences of Asian-American women, even when she tried to.

3.4 Drawing conclusions: Why immigrant parents differ from white parents when talking about sex with their Asian-American daughters

For Asian-American women who grew up with one or two white parents, communication surrounding sex, sexuality, and intimate relationships tended to be much more open between them and their parent(s), while Asian-immigrant parents often saw these kinds of conversations

as taboo, leading to a general silence in place of discussions. Furthermore, while guilt and shame were communicated as undesirable things by Laila's white parents, these were often used as tools by Asian-immigrant parents in order to persuade their daughters to adhere to their expectations. The use of guilt by immigrant parents was also incorporated a direct comparison to the perceived moral inferiority of white American teenagers. For some of the Asian-American women in this study, fear of disappointing their immigrant parents continue to influence their decisions into adulthood, while feelings of cultural disconnect replace cultural inclusion for those that choose not to abide by their immigrant families' expectations.

Differences between Asian-immigrant parents and white parents when it comes to communicating about sex and other expectations can be attributed to the ways in which parents themselves have been taught to either see sexual expression as a means for oppression or liberation. As discussed in the previous chapter on immigration, Asian-immigrants have a long-standing history of being perceived as a deviant, diseased, and sexually immoral presence within the U.S. Asian-immigrant women in particular have been perceived as all being prostitutes with exaggerated sexual appetites. Couple these perceptions with the ways in which Asian-American women are being represented within contemporary U.S. media as the dangerous and sexually-out of control Dragon Lady/Lotus Flower, and we can recognize how Asian-immigrant parents may possibly discourage sexual agency/expression amongst their daughters in an attempt to protect them from Western scrutinization. In addition, the often non-verbal discouragement of sexual agency/expression can also be regarded as immigrant parents' ways of maintaining a unique family unit that is distinguishable from American families whom they

perceive as raising disrespectful, out of control children, similar to the ones that Harini's parents see on shows like *Jerry Springer*.

Because white American parents were always-already perceived as the norm, their sexualities were not targeted with the same level of scrutinization as Asian immigrants. While non-heteronormative sexual orientations obviously problematizes and complicates this notion, I argue that Asian's sexualities are automatically and inherently read as non-normative while white bodies have the ability to "pass" as normative. Since white bodies have the ability to pass as more normative, the need to control and monitor their daughter's sexualities is lessened because the main point of concern is "predatory" teenage boys, while Asian-immigrant parents are often concerned with predatory teenage boys as well as hypersexual stereotypes working against their Asian-American daughters.

Chapter Four

Confronting, Resisting, and Challenging Gendered Racism in Romantic/Sexual Relationships

Asian women should be willing to do anything - like when I said that Asian women are expected to bend over backwards? I mean we are *literally* expected to bend over backwards. That's just what we're supposed to do, we're just these sex toys basically, and if you don't do that, then you're bad in bed. There are so many other gross things that we're expected to do. It's very inhuman, and it's very violent. If you're not "that" as an Asian woman, then you're not shit as an Asian woman (Eliza, 21, Chicago).

For countless Asian-American women such as Eliza, orientalist perceptions that they are hypersexual, perverse, and always-already sexually-willing, often shape their experiences with intimacy and dating. Expectations for Asian-American women to sexually perform in a particular manner that can be distinguished from white women's presumed sexual behavior often lead them to feel de-valued if they cannot, or do not want to, fulfill those expectations. Thus far, we have discussed the ways in which the perceived hypersexualization of Asian-American women in the contemporary U.S. is informed by U.S. immigration laws and western media's representations of Asian women as the deviant, sexually immoral, and dangerous Other. We have also discussed the ways that Asian-American women's gender and sexual identities continue to be influenced by verbal and non-verbal messages that were taught to them via intergenerational relationships throughout adolescence. These messages included expectations of how Asian-American women ought to act in order to preserve a sense of immigrant culture, as well as how they should perceive the sexual identities and sexual behaviors of white women. This chapter weaves together the previous discussions on immigration, media representations, and intergenerational communication patterns and utilizes them in order to (re)construct a more nuanced reading of how Asian-American women are (re)negotiating their gender and sexual identities within

romantic/sexual relationships. By shifting our focus to Asian-American women's experiences with intimacy and dating, we are able to see how these moments require them to perform a juggling act - they must balance hegemonic perceptions of their racialized gender, they must constantly measure the distance between their own decisions and their parents' expectations in terms of dating and being sexually active, and they must ultimately work to (re)establish a sense of autonomy and sexual agency as they navigate their ways through intimate/sexual relationships. For many of the Asian-American women in this study, recognizing their own autonomy and sexual agency is a back-and-forth process in which they negotiate between moments of feeling empowered, oppressed, and self-oppressed. While this chapter's discussion goes over these contentions, the main intent of my analysis is to reconceptualize all of their actions, perceptions, and strategies within romantic/sexual relationships as representative of their individual agency as it concerns their gender, sexuality, and race.

4.1 Exotification and "Touring" the Body: The sexual objectification of Asian-American women

I always wonder: if I decide to be intimate with someone, are they looking at me just to say, "Oh yeah, I was with an Asian girl for the first time last night." Like, are they really experiencing me for me, or are they just being a tourist who experiences me and then leaves my life? Are they looking to fulfill a fantasy that they saw in porn? Or are they looking to have sex with me? (Marisa, 22, Chicago)

Marisa's fear is shared by many other Asian-American women, and can be explained more broadly as a distrust for men with Yellow Fever. As explained by a Chinese writer for *The Telegraph U.K.*, Yuan Ren, Yellow Fever is a "well-peddled myth that Asian women make better sexual lovers than other women, while at the same time, having no meaningful presence in politics and popular culture." (Yuan 2016) Yuan's article touches on recent research conducted on Facebook and dating apps. Based off of the 2.4 million users of Facebook dating apps (that is, dating apps that are connected to your Facebook account), there was an explicit preference for

women of East Asian descent by men of all racial groups, “except, ironically, Asian men.” (Yuan 2016) I emphasize that portion of Yuan’s statement in quotes because of her use of the word “ironically.” As I will discuss later on in the chapter, Asian men and women’s tendencies to date outside of their racial group is not “ironic” at all given imperialist and orientalist discourses that have influenced Asians to increase their self value by “dating up,” or by having white romantic partners. Nevertheless, the blatant tendency for men of all races (besides Asian men) to have a preference for Asian women as sexual partners continues to exist, but the question is, why? If we refer back to *Terry and the Pirate*’s construction of the Dragon Lady as villainous yet undeniably eroticized and hypersexualized, we can reconfigure the same perceptions when analyzing Asian-American women’s desirability as it is perceived under the Western gaze. While the perceived danger and deviancy is not necessarily included in this reconfiguration, the Dragon Lady’s villainous nature, as well as her eroticism, is derived from American readers’ understanding of her as a foreigner, as exotic within the Western imaginary. The exotification of Asian-American women informs their perceived hypersexuality while simultaneously (re)constructing them as objects to be fetishized and collected by those with “Yellow Fever.” While all of the women in this study shared their experiences of being exotified by heterosexual men, none of them acknowledged that the term “exotic” is not originally used as a descriptive for people. On the contrary, when used as a noun, exotic refers to “foreign” plants or animals. The example used by Dictionary.com says, “He planted exotics in the sheltered garden.” (2016) When used as an adjective, the term refers to an object that originates from, or has characteristics of, a “distant foreign country.” Furthermore, the term “fetish,” which was used by participants when describing men with “Asian fetishes,” is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as, “an

inanimate object worshiped for its supposed magical powers or because it is considered to be inhabited by a spirit,” as well as its second definition which states, “A form of sexual desire in which gratification is linked to an abnormal degree to a particular object, item of clothing, part of the body, etc.” (2016) The participants’ usage of both terms, exotic and fetish, when describing men’s sexual desires for them as Asian-American women is not reflective of Asian women’s self-presentation as “foreign” plants, animals, or objects. Rather, their usage of the terms is reflective of how they are being perceived, constructed, and often used in inhumane ways by western discourses and intimate partners. Marisa, Vi, Eliza, and Priya mentioned the words “toy” and “dolls” when I asked them how they felt Asian women were stereotyped in the contemporary U.S. By naming inanimate objects that are meant to be posed, manipulated, and controlled, these women gave me a description of how they were seen as inanimate objects with no personal agency or control over their own bodies. When speaking about themselves and their interests, however, these women expressed a great deal of intelligence, drive, and ambition. Such positive and empowering traits are often regarded as irrelevant by potential partners, however, when they are more concerned about fulfilling sexual fantasies informed by their Asian fetishes, or fetishistic tendencies.

In addition, when Marisa expressed her fears of engaging with men sexually because of their possible fetishistic perception of her as sexual object, she made a direct comparison between her body, sex, and tourism when she said, “Are they really experiencing me for me, or are they just being a tourist who experiences me and leaves my life?” Marisa’s reference to tourism can be deconstructed and understood in two main ways. The first possibility is Marisa expressing feelings of always being perceived as a “foreigner,” therefore she fears that men treat their sexual

encounters as if she were a sexual commodity to be “experienced” like sex workers in the “Third World.” In this scenario, Marisa is viewed as a sexual commodity to be purchased and experienced by Western sex tourists. In Kamala Kempadoo’s piece, “Freelancers, Temporary Wives, and Beach-Boys: Researching Sex Work in the Caribbean,” Kempadoo discusses how prostitution within the West is perceived by sex tourists very differently than how it is perceived in “Third World” countries. There is an overall assumption that sex tourism in Third World countries is not the same prostitution because of Western-constructed notions that Third World women are hypersexual, immoral, and unintelligent, therefore perceiving female sex workers as participating in prostitution not for economic purposes, but because they are inherently hypersexual and corrupt beings who derive physical and emotional satisfaction from engaging with white men for money. While some women in Kempadoo’s study expressed hopes of finding long-term partners while working, it was also evident that they established their own sense of agency by making clear distinctions between work and romance, even when their clients were not aware of them making these distinctions (Kempadoo 2001). Taking this into account when analyzing Marisa’s comment, we can potentially see how these same Western understandings of Third World sex workers as agentless objects to be purchased partially shaped Marisa’s negative reaction to men acting like “tourists” - men who only sleep with her for the some “other-worldly” experience that cannot be experienced with white women. The second possible understanding of the word “tourist” can be a direct comparison between Marisa’s body, her sexuality, and the physical terrains of Third World countries. In Ann McClintock’s book, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, the introduction chapter, “Postcolonialism and the Angel of Progress,” begins by critiquing Henry Rider Haggard’s

bestselling novel, *King Solomon's Mines*, for the ways that Haggard's map to diamond mines in southern Africa constructs female bodies of color as literal sites for western men to conquer and exploit for its valuable, hidden goods. This conflation between "conquerable" land and women of color's bodies then frames colonized women as valuable solely for what they have to offer - whether that be the diamonds on Haggard's map or the "exotic" and "mysterious" sexualities of Asian women. Similar perceptions and behaviors can be seen from men with Asian fetishes who value Asian/Asian-American women primarily for their assumed ability to "give" them a sexual experience that cannot be experienced with white women. In either understanding of the term "tourism," Marisa's sexual identity is dehumanized by some sexual partners, while her individual agency and quest for personal pleasure is negated by them.

Fetishizing and exotifying Asian women for what their sexualities are perceived to "give" western men inadvertently constructs Asian women as mere vessels to be captured, conquered, opened up, and emptied of the "worth" that they have within them. This interpretation and understanding of exotification can be easily paralyzing for Asian/Asian-American women as they are wary of male sexual partners that view them this way, which is why I provide a section later on in the chapter on how Asian-American women are combatting, resisting, and challenging these acts of exotification and gendered racism.

4.2 Endearing or Infantilizing? Asian-American women negotiating with racialized-infantilization in romantic relationships

While Asian women are fetishized for their assumed hypersexuality and "exoticism," a western obsession with femininity and youth heavily informs the ways in which Asian women are being fetishized in the contemporary U.S. The infantilization of women in general has been

an issue that feminist scholars and activists have fought against throughout U.S. history, whether it be fighting for the right to vote, claiming space in the public sphere, for fighting for the right to have control over our own bodies. However, the infantilization of Asian women in particular permeates western understandings of Asian femininity, viewing Asian women as incapable of maturing physically and mentally, while white women are seen as capable of maturing. When talking about how Asian women are infantilized, Marisa perceived white women's experiences with sexuality and dating as less tenuous and difficult: "If I was a white female, I could sort of just slide by without ever having to look for these things in men. The issues I face everyday [as an Asian woman], I mean, I would like to find a partner that understands that." The issues Marisa referenced were well-summarized by Eliza when she said:

We're seen as being able to be taken advantage of. I think men see me as this Asian woman who will bend over backwards and compensate for whatever. It's like they see me and think, "Oh I can do whatever I want with you, I can use you in whatever way that I want because you're not going to say anything." That's just how I've felt in my dating experiences have often been like. Whether we're talking about it sexually or intimately. And it's just made it difficult to establish relationships because they want to take advantage of me and see me as this docile, little girl thing that they can use. And that's really messed up!

Eliza's description of men that view her as a child who is incapable of making her own decisions is very unsettling for her. Such a description is portrayed as rather violent when we can see how non-existent individual agency is being constructed. "I can do whatever I want with you, I can use you in whatever way that I want because you're not going to say anything," is an alarming statement that implies that consent is completely non-existent during sexual encounters. While Eliza, or any of the other participants, did not mention experiences of rape, being sexually

coerced, or sexually assaulted in any way, the objectification and hypersexualization of Asian women often constructs them as inhumane and solely existing for the sexual pleasure of western men, therefore not capable of giving consent or exercising agency.

When describing her relationship with an ex-boyfriend from high school, Eliza explained the difficulties of deciphering his behavior as romantic or infantilizing. She described his subtle behaviors as unsettling because of how his “romantic” gestures were often read as more paternalistic and belittling:

He used to be like, “oh you’re so cute,” like little things like that, and I would wonder if that was endearing? Because he’s being really sweet to me, but he’s also kind of treating me like a child at the same time, and I wasn’t really into it.

Eliza’s interpretation of her ex-boyfriend’s seemingly harmless comment as infantilizing is also related to her own awareness that she is a physically “small” Asian woman “without curves.” She described herself in this manner while equating it to how Asian women are seen as being easy to control - as physically and mentally weaker than American men:

I think guys just really want to feel like they can take advantage of the situation, because I’m like this really child-like thing to them. [Asian women] aren’t seen as an equal, as an adult even. I don’t necessarily know how to explain it, but I feel like I’ve had so many experiences where in the moment, I feel like I’m being treated as a little girl which is super disturbing. Why do men want to have sex with children? Really though! My gosh, that’s what it is! Because if you like me because you perceive me as this child, as this cute little girl, then that means you’re attracted to that. And well, that really says something about [men] that is not okay, because why would you want to take advantage of a child in that way? Why do you want to engage sexually with that kind of behavior?

Eliza's critique of men who fetishize Asian women in an infantilistic manner is a crucial moment in which Eliza resists colonialist and orientalist discourses by refusing to accept that this eroticized perception of Asian women is natural or right. Eliza deconstructs the fetishization of Asian women in order to lay out the ways in which Asian women are being sexualized for very problematic reasons. She first points out how Asian women are being regarded in the same way as children by men, but then she points out that by sexually-desiring Asian women who are seen as "child-like," men are simultaneously displaying a sexual desire for children. Without having to explicitly say so, Eliza equates men with Asian-fetishes to pedophiles. While fetishizing and being sexually attracted to a racial group is not seen as a mental illness, pedophilia is commonly regarded with immense amount of hostility and disgust, while those that are labeled as pedophiles are seen as being some of the most perverse and sexually deviant people within society. Eliza's ability to articulate the pedophilic nature that exists within the fetishization of Asian women is an act of repositioning the demonizing gaze onto these men, as well as the western discourses that inform these fetishizations. While Asian women have been historically regarded as inherently deviant, sexually immoral, and perverse within and by western discourses, Eliza points the finger back at these discourses and pathologizes them rather than allowing herself to be pathologized as the hypersexual, immoral, and deviant Asian woman so deeply engrained in the western imaginary. Rather than accepting the orientalist notion that there is something inherent to her nature as an Asian woman that entices, provokes, and/or creates an unnatural sexual desire within western men, she asserts that the issue lies within the men themselves.

As Eliza recognized, however, completely dismantling these problematic perceptions of Asian women is a difficult, emotionally-stressful task. Eliza said that while she may be able to stand up to men who fetishize her and say to them, “I’m not interested in you, because i’m not a fetish,” she knows that “falling into” the problematic things that her partners say is quite common. “Sometimes you’re really interested in someone even though you know the underlying tones of why they’re attracted to you, but you just forgive it because you want attention, or companionship.” Eliza expressed feelings of trauma and hurt from these kinds of experiences, which is why, at the time of the interview, she felt that intimate and sexual relationships were not worth the inevitable hurt she learned to anticipate:

I’m just being really cognizant of who I let in, who I date. I’ve been really picky lately, and I’ve just wanted to be alone versus seeking anything else because it’s just not worth it to me right now. It’s been like this for a few months. I haven’t wanted to go on a date, or have any hookups or anything like that. I just feel like I’ve been so taken advantage of in these ways, whether it be I understood that I was being taken advantage of, or if it was more of a subconscious thing that I realized later on. I was just being hurt by these stereotypes of what I needed to add up to, of what I needed to be.

For Eliza, the trade-off between accepting gendered-racism as a part of her intimate/sexual relationships and companionship was no longer worth the pain she felt from these interactions. Eliza made a conscious decision to step away from intimate/sexual relationships because she was starting to feel oppressed and violated by the men she was engaging with sexually and intimately. She explained to me that she reached a point of self-blame where she began asking herself, “why do I put myself in these situations?” In this moment, Eliza shifted some of the blame onto herself, momentarily relieving the racist and sexist discourses of taking responsibility for creating these harmful stereotypes against Asian women. As a researcher and as an Asian-

American woman who truly empathized with Eliza's feelings of being traumatized in intimate relationships, I wanted to reach out and tell her that none of this was her fault. On the other hand, however, I soon recognized this moment as a way for Eliza to reassert control over her emotions, and to reframe her gender and sexual identities as not articulated by outside western forces, but by her own doing. While I did not wish Eliza to feel that she is to blame for the pain she has endured, I also acknowledged her cognizance and autonomous decision to take a step back and reevaluate her desires as indicators of her agency as an Asian-American woman who continuously faces gendered-racism. Whether Asian-American women decide to take a step back or remain within their existing relationships with men who rarely, sometimes, or often treat them in ways that are indicative of gendered-racism, we must always recognize their decisions as autonomous and complex. Eliza's decision to take a break from any sort of intimate or sexual relationship was her form of self-protection and a (re)negotiation of her needs and desires.

Vi, on the other hand described the situation that she was in at the time as "purely sexual, and not intimate." At the time of the interviews, Vi conceptualized intimacy as something she could only have with women, and since she was not looking for a long-term relationship, casually sleeping with men without the emotional attachment is what worked for her. Vi described this male friend of her's whom she was casually sleeping with as someone she has known since high school. She explained that while he saw her as "a cute little thing that he needs to protect because I'm little, female, and Asian," she further explained, "sometimes it's okay with me to just be the tiny cute thing." For this particular situation, Vi decided that being treated as a "cute little thing" was not just allowable, but also enjoyable for her. Vi's specification of this being okay "sometimes" shows us how this decision constantly shifts, therefore her acceptance and

enjoyment of being treated that way was not to be assumed in every romantic/sexual situation. Furthermore, Vi situated herself as the one who was able to decide when romantic partners could treat her in a child-like manner, thus further exemplifying her agency in (re)negotiating her gender and sexual identity.

The experiences, attitudes, and perceptions shared by Vi and Eliza appear to be quite different. At the time of the interview, Vi felt as though there were certain moments that being infantilized in a sexual/intimate relationship was okay by her, and even enjoyable. In contrast, Eliza decided that she had reached a point where she could no longer tolerate romantic/sexual partners infantilizing her while simultaneously sexualizing her. However, both Asian-American women consciously engaged with western perceptions of Asian being small, docile, submissive, and ultimately child-like, and they both made conscious decisions on how to negotiate their gender and sexual identities when confronted with such perceptions. While their courses of negotiation appear to lead them in opposing directions, each direction is still motivated by a need to establish a sense of agency over their racialized and gendered sexualities as their agencies are constantly being tested while engaging in sexual/intimate/romantic relationships with men.

4.3 Dating “Up”: Colonial mentality and dating white men

Thought Catalog, an online publishing platform that operates under the idea that “all thinking is relevant,” has been heavily criticized for allowing writers to publish racist, sexist, and homophobic content. However, the problematic content found in articles such as, “5 Reasons Asian Girls Love White Men,” is indicative of a larger western perspective that constructs Asian

women in a homogenous, monolithic fashion while also (re)constructing white men as physically, mentally, and sexually superior to Asian men. While each participant stated that they never felt inclined to date someone within their own racial group, or has ever dated someone from their own racial group, the underlying reasonings behind their decisions when choosing a partner is far more complex than what Yuri Nakashima's 2014 article described. According to Nakashima, the five reasons that Asian women prefer white men can be summarized by: (1) white men are generally taller than Asian men, which is seen as desirable by "Asian girls" because they are on a "never-ending quest to be as cute as possible," so, "a tall man that emphasizes their petiteness is a total plus." (Nakashima 2014); (2) white men are more assertive than Asian men and will approach "Asian girls" at a bar with "clever" conversation starters such as, "I always burn my rice. Do you have any advice?" Asian men, on the other hand, are socially awkward and unable to approach Asian girls; (3) white men are "cultured" who take their Asian dates to see "*Madame Butterfly* and then to dinner at a Viet-French Fusion restaurant." In addition, white men are "extremely well versed in the history and culture of their date's homeland, and some speak the native language better than she does, having majored in it at college and/or lived there for at least a year." According to the writer, Asian girls find this both "comforting and flattering," while also acknowledging how their white date's interest is a reflection of their "deep intellectual curiosity"; (4) unlike Asian men, white men cook which reflects how "un-chauvinistic they are"; (5) white men are "emotionally aware" which is the exact opposite of Asian girls' fathers who are "emotionless" and incapable of expressing affection (Nakashima 2014). The reasons listed by Nakashima are undoubtedly underdeveloped, racist against Asian men, and infantilizing of Asian women as she constantly refers to them as

“Asian girls” yet says “white men” and “Asian men” throughout the whole piece. As an Asian woman herself, one has to wonder if this piece was written as a joke or if she actually believes these things to be true from her own experiences with dating.

Marisa had never dated an Asian man before and could only recall one Asian man she felt attracted to in the past. When thinking about what was significant about the one Asian man she found attractive, Marisa said, “It’s so weird now that I think of it. I don’t know why he was different, but as superficial as it is, I think that it helped that he was a big guy. Especially with Asian guys who are usually smaller, it just makes me feel like I have to be smaller.” Marisa’s internalization of feminine and masculine ideologies that construct men as physically bigger and dominant while women are meant to be smaller and physically submissive, influenced the ways that she perceived Asian men as typically undesirable partners. Nakashima conceptualized Asian women’s underlying desire for tall white men because of their quest to be “as cute as possible,” but we can see that Marisa’s preference has much deeper implications than just looking “cute.” For Marisa, the height and size of her partner is a direct reflection of how much she measures up to an idealized feminine body. Throughout the interview, Marisa mentioned feeling unable to relate to other Chinese women because she does not have that stereotypical short and petite frame that all Asian women are assumed to have. Interestingly, later on in the interview Marisa described her ideal partner as someone that would be able to empathize with the gendered racism that she faces as an Asian-American woman, yet she did not describe her ideal partner as an Asian man. Marisa’s description gave me a sense that she was looking for a white man who was “cultured” and sympathetic enough to listen to her and *attempt* to understand her perspective,

while negating Asian men from the conversation because of their “smaller” unattractive appearance.

During interviews, I also found that some of the women were conceptualizing “desirable” and “ideal” partners through an internalized colonial mentality that constructed white men and western culture as modern, intellectual, and superior in comparison to “traditional” Asian men (David 2013). Marisa had also mentioned that another reason that she doesn’t date Chinese men was because they would expect her to be this “certain Chinese wife.” Similarly, Riley described herself as “not the type of Asian girl” to date an Asian man. Riley described herself as outgoing, outspoken, and adventurous - traits that she felt would not mix well with “Asian men” that were looking for a “traditional” Asian girlfriend. Marisa and Riley’s self-perception as being outside of the “traditional” framework for Asian women can be interpreted as them situating themselves as more American and therefore “modern” and superior to the “type” of Asian women that would date other Asian men. As a result of western colonization, Orientalist discourses position white male partners as the most ideal in heteronormative relationships. As discussed by Nguyen Tan Hoang, the (de)sexualization of Asian men in western discourses is linked to their perceived passivity and effeminacy - traits that are not traditionally seen as part of “successful” masculinity. Similar to the rhetoric found with the mid 1900’s “War Bride” phenomenon, or within Riley’s positive reading of Asian actresses being romantically cast with white actors in films, pairing off with the dominant racial group results in: (1) the leveraging of the minority group as they transcend racial barriers through romantic relationships, (2) the upholding of hegemonic masculinity - one that situates white straight men at the top of the racial hierarchy with Asian men below them, and (3) the maintaining of Orientalist notions surrounding Asian

men's perceived backwardness and lack of modernity. Considering the last two points, the first point of transcending racial barriers is actually a falsehood that many Asian-Americans internalize. The belief that by "dating up" one can escape the negative stereotypes associated with being a racialized Other reaffirms gender-specific racism by repositioning white men as the ideal partners who can "save" Asian women from the backwardness of the Orient.

Priya and Harini were the only participants that explicitly commented on the possible benefits of dating another Indian person, although neither of them have before. When explaining her definition of intimacy, Priya related it back to the kind of trust and bond she felt with her family, and went even further to explain that her ideal intimate relationship would be similar to the kind of closeness that she felt that immigrants and first-generation individuals had with each other. However, two years ago, Priya claimed that she would not have entertained the idea of dating an Indian man and this was because she was always surrounded by white people, therefore Indian men were not as prevalent. Additionally, most of the Indian men that she did know were her family members or her family friends. The last reason Priya gave me was, "I just didn't find them attractive." Priya's reasons for not dating Indian men, at least in the past, are interconnected with one another. Growing up in a middle-upper class, predominantly white neighborhood and attending predominantly white schools made it more difficult to meet Indian men that were not her family members or close friends of the family. This attributed to Priya's perception of white men being more available therefore more desirable than Indian men. A white-dominated society that was predominantly run by white beauty standards also contributed to Priya's perception of Indian men as unattractive.

Understanding why white men tend to be sought after more in comparison to Asian men requires us to look deeper than the perceived prevalence of one racial group over the other. While Asian women are constructed as homogenous, hypersexual, submissive, and servile by colonialist and orientalist discourses, Asian men are also being homogeneously constructed, but often as effeminate and asexual. The perceived effeminacy of Asian men in Western discourses is problematized when referring back to how Asian-immigrant men were seen as lascivious sex fiends who frequented brothels and were a threat to white womanhood in the later half of the nineteenth century. However, the more contemporary discourses of Asians and their sexuality tend to hyper-feminize both Asian women and men in order to uphold white masculinity (Hoang 2014). The feminization of Asian men in the contemporary U.S. can be most readily seen in the nerdy sidekick roles given to Asian actors, while the kung fu master/ninja/samurai is seen as more dangerous and deadly, yet always characterized by his “desexualized Zen asceticism.” (Fung 2005). Representations of Asian men as sexually inferior, or sexuality being completely nonexistent within them, contribute to the perceived undesirability of Asian men, while the opposing representations of white men as strong, cultured, diverse, modern, and heroic are highly valued for their ability to uphold a hegemonic masculinity.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge the strong influence that immigrant parents have on their daughters’ preferences for white partners over Asian partners. For those that were transracially adopted, they described their parents as being open to any racial group that their daughters would want to date. While their parents’ possible underlying preferences for one racial group over another was not explicitly communicated by them (according to the transracially adopted participants), these preferences were often communicated by immigrant parents -

preferences that positioned white men and men of the same ethnic group as the most desired by parents, while black men were seen as the least desired. For example, many Filipino-American women's immigrant Catholic parents often display a strong preference for white partners, while explicitly forbidding their daughters to date black and Muslim men. With a history deeply embedded in Spanish colonization, Catholicism is seen as a trademark of the Filipino family unit, therefore passing down Catholic traditions through generations is a way to keep the family unit in-tact, even after generations of living in the U.S. Therefore, while most Filipino-immigrant parents would not outwardly admit that they are prejudiced towards Muslims, the risk of diminishing their cultural ties by "lessening" the "purity" of their Catholic/Christian family identities is often enough of a threat to admonish their daughters from dating outside of their religion (David 2014). Furthermore, A colonial mentality that sees whiteness as a sign of superiority then perceives dark skin as a sign of poorness/working class status, being unintelligent, and morally inferior. Therefore, partnering up with a racial group of lighter skin tones increases the chances of having offspring of a lighter pigmentation, thus "improving" the family lineage. While religion is often used as a means to maintain a sense of culture tied back to the immigrant family unit, marrying "up" can simultaneously occur for the "benefit" of the family. E.J.R. David's conceptualization of "internalized oppression" resurfaces here as we see how the colonized begin to perceive themselves as inherently inferior and in need of westernization (David 2014). As similarly explained by Hiromi Ono and Justin Berg's "Marital Assimilation Hypothesis," intermarriage between non-whites and whites are one of the major steps towards western assimilation, with the ultimate, yet unspoken, end-goal being the eventual removal of physical attributes that make them distinguishable from whites.

4.4 “Sometimes you just have to shut that shit down”: Resisting exotification and gendered racism in intimate relationships

While all of the Asian-American women in this study experienced moments of exotification, hypersexualization, infantilization, and ultimately being Othered by men, they each had their own ways of pushing back against these notions, while still attempting to find potential sexual/romantic partners. For the women in this study, exotification tended to take form in men’s “compliments” to them. Statements such as, “you’re so beautiful - so exotic!” or, “you’re a really pretty Asian girl,” were commonly said to these Asian-American women. Within these moments of being exotified, the women understood the men’s “compliments” as emphasizing their non-white identity as the dominating reason for their perceived attractiveness. However, the significance in these women’s stories lie primarily within their resistance and/or direct challenging of being exotified by men. For example, Priya shared her experience of being exotified at a college party and her strong reaction towards it:

It was sophomore year and I’m at this party, standing outside with a bunch of my friends who are smoking. I’m just standing there, and this guy goes, “you look so...exotic,” and I immediately think, “Nuh-uh. No, no, no!” And you know, I am very loving and nice to people that have earned it, but if you’re just some stranger calling me exotic then I am not about to just laugh it off. So I say back, “Is that a nice way of saying that I’m foreign?” and this guy is just like, “oh shit...” and then he gets defensive and tries to explain to me: “No, I just meant that you look like an Egyptian princess or something.” So I said, “well you have the right color, but you got the wrong country.” And he just didn’t know what to say back to that, so he got a little pissed off and finally said, “I was just trying to say that you’re beautiful!” I’m exhausted by that point so I say, “Then just say that! Just fucking say that. It’s so simple.”

Priya’s experience of being exotified at a party was manifested in this man’s perception of all attractive brown women looking like “Egyptian princesses.” While he obviously thought that he

was giving Priya a compliment, she immediately understood what he was saying to be problematic for its homogenizing and racist nature. By making this clear, Priya challenged his perceptions of brown women as it was informed by his racist understandings of desirability. Furthermore, in that moment Priya understood that accepting his “compliment” would mean that she had to appear as though she were accepting his racist comments aimed at her. Therefore, Priya denied his “compliment” and corrected him.

Similar to Priya, Marisa described her own experiences with exotification but explained her own strategies of coping by identifying a “threshold”:

I’ve met people in intimate settings and they’ll just be like, “Oh I think you’re a really really pretty Asian girl,” and I’m just like super turned off and say, “Yeah...really? I thought you were a really basic white boy, but now I just think you’re an asshole.” I think there’s almost some kind of threshold. Like when they say, “Wow, you’re really pretty,” but then relate it to me being Asian, I’m just like, “Okay. I’ll take the pretty part.” I don’t always encounter men like that, but when I do there is that threshold of when it gets to that point, and I’m just like annoyed because I know they just want me to be their doll or something.

Marisa’s experience exemplified how she negotiated gendered racism in a strategic, tactful manner. This “threshold” that she referred to was established to challenge exotification by men, but it also worked as a strategy of self-protection. Rather than allowing herself to internalize comments that exotified her as an Asian-American woman, and buying into the notion that her beauty and desirability are contingent on her perceived Otherness, Marisa decided to accept only one part of the statement (being beautiful), but denied the latter part of the statement (being beautiful because she is Asian).

Strategies of resisting and challenging exoticification and gendered racism in intimate settings can be explicitly demonstrated, as shown by Priya and Marisa, but it can also take on much more subtle forms. Eliza described a moment in which her high school boyfriend made her feel exoticified and uncomfortable to the point that all she could respond with was, “I love you, but I don’t know what to say.” Riley also recalled moments in which she felt uncomfortable on being exoticified by men while on dates so she attempted to change the conversation so that her race would no longer be discussed. Vi’s decision to pick and choose moments that she is okay with being exoticified, or treated in an infantilized manner because of her gender and race, or Eliza’s active decision to temporarily refrain from dating all together, can be seen as their non-confrontational ways of resistance and self-care. Whether Asian-American women are choosing to verbalize their discomfort and intolerance to gendered racism to the men that perpetrate such behavior, or if they choose to cope with gendered racism in more subtle, non-confrontational manners, each woman must be acknowledged for her agency as well as her ability to decide for her self which course of action to take. If we can only conceptualize one way for Asian-American women to exercise their agency, exert control over their relationships, and combat gendered racism, then we make the mistake of re-victimizing them. Asian-American women need multi-faceted, diverse, and flexible ways to (re)negotiate their gender and sexual identities - ways that are representative of how complex, nuanced, and diverse each one of them is.

Conclusion

(Re)Conceptualizing Asian-American Women in Future Socio-Political Feminist Discourses

If a perceived hypersexuality, perverseness, and outsider-status are still existing for Asian-American women, what are we to do about it? How am I, or any other Asian-American woman, supposed to establish agency, exercise autonomy, and experience love and pleasure without having to constantly reside in a state of hyper self-vigilance? As discussed throughout my M.A. thesis, the continuous Othering of Asian women within contemporary western discourses is reflective of the United States' dependency on colonialist ideologies - ideologies that reaffirm a white patriarchal social order in which Asian-American women are perceived as sexualized objects that uphold a white hegemonic masculinity. As Asian-American women, we are constantly confronted by these realities, and at times it feels as though we do not stand a chance against the racist and sexist discourses so deeply rooted in our country's history. However, After interviewing this amazing group of Asian-American women I have come to learn that there is no single way for us to achieve agency and autonomy - there is no single way for us to experience love, pleasure, joy, and friendship. But within all of our actions and experiences, there is radical potential for change; there is hope that one day our society will recognize the power that we as Asian-American women have always possessed - the same power that many of us have learned to deny within our immigrant parents, within eachother, and within ourselves.

These women and their stories reminded me that agency and empowerment, whether it by my own or a whole community's, is constantly shifting and taking on new - and old - forms. The

conversations I had with these women also taught me that our agency and empowerment cannot ever be completely divorced from the pain and oppression that are hallmarks of our histories within the United States - that we may never be able to shed that history and grow new skin, completely unblemished by the harm caused by colonialist and orientalist discourses. Rather, as Asian-American women who continuously (re)negotiate our gender and sexual identities, we acquire new layers that are sometimes similar to each other's, other times quite distinguishable. This new layer is not calloused nor scabbed, but an exoskeleton-like shield that allows us to navigate our ways throughout painful, joyous, pleasurable, and traumatic terrains with pride, power, and hope. As we continue to (re)negotiate our identities, we challenge homogenous notions surrounding Asian femininity, and we assert ourselves against the discourses that work so vehemently to compartmentalize, contain, and control us. Even when we are not aware of it, we are *always* in the process of rewriting our histories and reshaping our futures.

Within the contemporary U.S., Asian-American women are constantly working with and against colonialist and orientalist discourses that construct them as the hypersexual, submissive, and deviant Other. Asian-American women continue to face the impacts of gendered racism as it has been (re)articulated through U.S. immigration laws and the representations in western popular media. U.S. immigration laws and the media have worked to legitimize the assumed hypersexuality and moral inferiority of Asian-American women - a legitimization that upholds a white patriarchy and maintains the objectification of Asian women so that they may continuously be perceived as existing within the U.S. as always-already sexually available for western men. In addition, the upholding of white female domination over Asian women occurs as we see Asian women being articulated within western discourses by their constructed differences from white

women. The strategic comparisons between Asian women and white women can be traced back to the Red Cross Bride Schools in Japan during the mid-1900's. At these schools, Japanese war brides were taught by white women to properly assimilate to western ways of domesticity. However, there was an persistent underlying message within these bride schools - Asian war brides would never be able to become the "perfect" American housewife for their American husbands because Asian women would never be granted access into white domesticity. Articles and films from the 1940's and 1950's that focused on Asian war brides appear to portray them in a positive manner, and yet if we analyze the content further, we can see how orientalist discourses existed within these articles and films, constructing Asian-immigrant women as always-already foreigners that necessitated constant (re)assimilation into western society.

The Asian-American women in this study attributed the hypersexualization of Asian women to the lack of diversity within the U.S. popular media. Many of the women shared experiences of being hypersexualized, exotified, infantilized, and objectified by men, making heterosexual intimacy a constant process of self-negotiation. Women such as Riley, Eliza, and Marisa blamed representations of Asian women in porn as sexually submissive and always sexually-willing for the existence of men with Yellow Fever. Yellow fever, or the fetishization of Asian women, constructs Asian women as a homogenous, monolithic group whose only value lies within their assumed "other-worldly" sexuality. Archetypes of the deadly, sexually-aggressive Dragon Lady and the sexually-servile Lotus Flower continue to permeate western media is Asian-American actresses are given the same roles as supporting actresses in Hollywood. However, while we know these kinds of representations to not be stand-in's for all Asian/Asian-American women, it is important to acknowledge how Asian-American women are also engaging positively with the

Asian women they see on screen. For example, we discussed how Riley found Lucy Liu's role in *Charlie's Angels* as empowering because her character was strong, independent, and outgoing. Similarly, representations of the Dragon Lady from the comic strip, *Terry and the Pirates*, as well as the reconfiguration of the *Dragon Lady* in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* are often seen as very empowering figures that encourages Asian/Asian-American women to embrace their sexuality and challenge assumptions that they cannot be in control or in powerful positions over men. Similarly, social media sites such as Facebook and Youtube have given Asian/Asian-American women a wider, more accessible platform from which new racial, gender, and sexual identities can be created. Social media sites are also an important space where Asian/Asian-American women can have their experiences with gendered racism legitimated, while simultaneously pushing back against colonialist and orientalist discourses through the formation of community resistance on the internet. Acknowledging how Asian/Asian-American women are engaging with hegemonic discourses that perceive them as the hypersexual Other in a subversive manner is a crucial part of this work. If we can only perceive Asian-American women as receptors of orientalist ideologies, rather than being capable of challenging and transforming them, we fail to do real feminist work - we fail to (re)empower Asian-American women.

The homogenization of Asian-American women is challenged when we look at how different their upbringings are from one another. While we often see Asian-American women with immigrant parents sharing common experiences, we also see how transracially adopted Asian-American women are taught very different things by their white parents. The empirical research showed general patterns that, on the surface, can distinguish Asian-American women with immigrant parents from women with white parents by identifying immigrant families' emphasis

on the family unit as a collective rather than children as autonomous individuals. This does not mean to say that immigrant parents denied their children of autonomy - Harini's Indian mother, for example, taught her the strategy of "looking behind the curtain" in order to be successful in the U.S. Her mother's strategy of learning the American system and using it to her benefit is reflective of her own agency and subversive strategies. Similarly, Priya described her mother teaching her to work "twice as hard" as Americans do, and then to work triple times as hard because she is a woman. Priya's mother understood her and her daughters' positioning as a double-minority within the U.S., therefore encouraging Priya to establish a strong work ethic was her way of teaching Priya how to exercise agency in a society that already perceives her as different. Harini and Priya's mothers taught them how to be autonomous in these ways, yet these lessons are still connected to a larger immigrant mentality that positions first generation Asian-American daughters as representatives of their immigrant families and culture. Additionally, first-generation Asian-American women are often discouraged from dating or exploring one's sexual autonomy by their immigrant parents. As discussed by Yen Le Espiritu, the chastity of Asian-American daughters are often used by immigrant parents in order to counter colonialist/orientalist discourses that portrayed Asian women as hypersexual, immoral, and backwards. Because of this, discussions about dating and sexuality were often non-existent between immigrant parents and their daughters, unless it was to warn them against being sexually active.

In contrast, the transracially adopted participants' parents had a tendency to encourage individual growth and self-exploration when it came to dating. Unlike most of the immigrant parents, white parents often held discussions with their daughters that allowed the girls to feel in-control of their decisions. Laila's adoptive parents expressed their wishes for Laila to be safe,

happy, and healthy, but also made sure to relieve any sense of guilt if Laila did not wish to follow their expectations. For Laila, guilt was something that was prevented from happening while immigrant parents often used guilt to encourage their daughters to abide by their expectations. For example, Priya described feeling guilty if she did not succeed in school or follow through with her goals because she felt like she would let her parents down. Similarly, the participants with immigrant parents showed more concern about potential long-term partners - would their parents be approving; would they understand their culture? This guilt or pressure from immigrant parents is commonly understood as a way for immigrant families to maintain a unitary identity away from western culture. Therefore, by encouraging first-generation children to abide by family/cultural expectations, immigrant families can be seen as protecting themselves against western influence - an influence that they feel raise teenagers to be lazy, disrespectful, and sexually out of control.

For each participant, dealing with exotification was a constant task when engaging with heterosexual men. While some of the participants identified as queer with the others identifying as heterosexual, all of them only experienced exotification, infantilization, and hypersexualization by (predominantly white) men. Many of the women attributed these perceptions to the hypersexualized and submissive representations of Asian women in pornography and the media. Many of the women expressed frustration and even trauma when thinking about how past men have treated them as sex objects, or “dolls,” to be manipulated for their sexual satisfaction.

Some of the women shared more explicit means of resisting exotification in intimate settings, while others explained less confrontational strategies of resisting. This does not mean to say that

the women have not utilized both explicit and subtle strategies of resisting gendered racism when interacting with men, but the stories they chose to share with me during the interview varied from one another. Priya shared stories of being exoticized by another college student at a house party. Her reaction was to verbally point out to him the racist errors in his statement, and deny his attempt at “complimenting” her because she did not feel that being called a beautiful “Egyptian princess” when she is Indian is a positive thing. Similarly, Marisa strategically identifies a threshold when interacting with men. She defined this threshold as the moment when a man brings up her Asian identity for the reason that she is attractive. For example, when a man says to Marisa, “you’re really pretty,” she accepts it. However, when a man says, “You’re a really pretty Asian girl,” Marisa rejects the comment and his attempt at engaging with her.

Constantly negotiating between protecting oneself from being exoticized and attempting to find an intimate/romantic/sexual partner can be a very tiresome, and often traumatic, experience of Asian-American women. At the time of the interviews, Eliza was refraining from dating or engaging sexually with anyone because she felt emotionally drained from past relationships. She no longer wanted to put up with men exoticizing and infantilizing her, and she described these actions as “violent” to her emotional well-being. Being exoticized, hypersexualized, and infantilized without consenting to it is an act of violence, particularly when women’s humanity and personhood is acknowledged after their assumed sexual value to men. Eliza’s decision to temporarily step away from sexual/romantic relationships is reflective of her agency as a individual who knows what is best for her, and how to best take care of herself in that moment. While Vi treated these situations as a case-by-case scenario - that is, she would decide which times she would allow men to exoticify or treat her like a child - her decisions must also be

acknowledged as her ability to exercise autonomy over her gender and sexual identities. All of these women, whether they spoke out against being exoticized, identified a threshold, took a break from romantic/sexual relationships, or claimed the right to change their mind about being exoticized at any time they choose, exercised gender and sexual agency as they decided for themselves which course of action to take. Each woman's actions, while may appearing to be very different from one another, are exemplifications of how different Asian-American women can be from one another, thus challenging assumptions that Asian-American women can be collapsed into a monolithic group.

Understanding how Asian-American women are (re)negotiating their gender and sexual identities in the contemporary U.S. is a necessary and continuous responsibility to be carried out within feminist scholarship. The varying experiences of Asian-American women is representative of how different Asian-American women themselves can be from one another, which not only challenges hegemonic western discourses, but it also challenges the homogenizing tendencies of feminist discourses. Asian-American women's positioning within the U.S. must be acknowledged as unique for the histories of Asian women being constructed as always-already hypersexual, morally inferior, deviant, and perverse, therefore inherently incapable of fully assimilating into western society.

While contemporary western feminism is rooted in a fight to dismantle patriarchal, racist, homophobic, transphobic, and ableist institutions, "women of color" tend to be collapsed into one group, with their different histories, struggles, communities, and goals clumped together in a homogenous fashion. Specific and sufficient attention needs to be given to Asian-American women in the same way that black women's experiences have been given legitimacy within

feminist academia and activism. White feminist schools of thought continue to dominate the field, but it should be acknowledged that the black feminist movement has grown tremendously since the 1960's. Kimberle Crenshaw, bell hooks, and Angela Davis, to name a few of the major scholars that inform black feminist schools of thought, are taught side-by-side with white feminists in one-hundred level courses; powerful socio-political movements stemming from the Civil Rights movement to the Black Lives Matter movement have attracted attention from the media, scholars, and the U.S. government. My point here is not to delegitimize the amazing strides that black activists within the U.S. have made throughout the decades. Rather, my intent is to highlight the relatively non-existent state of Asian-American feminist activism within the University, as well as the major fragmentation of the Asian-American community within the U.S., and the overall tendency for intersectional feminist epistemologies to negate Asian-American feminism from critical conversations. All of these things have contributed to the lack of Asian-American community resistance and effective mobilization, while the more common legitimization and acknowledgement of Black women's experiences have allowed effective community organization and mobilization within professional institutions at higher rates than before. Treating Asian-Americanness as a niched identity and/or field of study within feminist academia is reflective of how Asian-Americans are niched in dominant western discourses.

As feminists, we need to be invested in the fight to dismantle all hegemonic discourses and to continuously practice self-reflexivity so that we may dismantle the hegemonic discourses that exist within our own classrooms, our feminist communities, our organizations, our rallies, and conferences. By bringing attention to Asian-American women's individual agency and strategies of resistance/empowerment as they navigate their ways throughout contemporary western

discourses is not just for their benefit, but also so that others may see the radical potential of Asian-American women. Our stories can change the way that society conceptualizes Asian-Americanness, femininity, immigrant narratives, representations in the media, sexual and gender expression, and more. Feminism needs a more nuanced reading of Asian-American women, just like Asian-American women need feminism.

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